



Jun 17, 2024

Hon. Diane LeBouthiller, Minister, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Cc: Mr. Doug Wentzell, Action Regional Director General Gulf Region
Alain Hebert, Gulf Regional Director, Ecosystems Management,
Marc LeCouffe, Gulf Regional Director, Fisheries and Harbours Management,
Matthew Hardy, Gulf Regional Director, Science Branch
Dr. John Ritter (DFO, retired)
Other members of the NBSC Executive

Via: e-mail

Dear Honourable Minister:

RE: Atlantic salmon / Striped bass situation on the Miramichi River, NB

You are undoubtedly aware of the situation where an over-abundance of striped bass is disrupting the ecological balance of fish species of the Miramichi River drainage and of adjacent rivers. In 2019, the Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommended to your department to fix this situation:

Recommendation 2

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada's restoration framework prioritize the long-term balance of fish species in the Southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence and Miramichi River.

They also recommended the methods by which to do so:

Recommendation 3

That a mechanism for controlling the striped bass population include (underline emphasis ours) a First Nation commercial and food, social and ceremonial fishery, and recreational public food catch and possession limits. (Our interpretation of this recommendation is that the expansion of these fisheries be of sufficient magnitude to accomplish Recommendation 2, above, and that other commercial fisheries should be used to control the bass population.); and

Recommendation 4

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada remove the maximum length restriction of 65 cm for the striped bass retention fishery, unless required for protection of spawners and population management.

Your department's attempts to follow these recommendations have been feeble and the bass population is now approximately 500,000 spawners, a level that has resulted in greater than 90% mortality of salmon smolts exiting the Northwest Miramichi in 2023. Similar bass numbers in recent



years have caused similar unacceptable smolt mortality rates. The Northwest Miramichi's salmon population is on its last legs, and that of the Southwest Miramichi is precipitously declining as well.

It seem like your department is blind to the problem at hand. In past CSAS publications they have blamed the salmon's decline on the effects of the mothballed Heath Steele Mine, a poor smolt tagging / tracking study design, and recently, in conversations with interested parties, that the Miramichi's salmon's decline is simply a trend that is common to all east coast salmon rivers.

A new report (attached to covering e-mail) by Dr. John A. Ritter, retired Manager of the Diadromous Fish Division of the Maritimes Region Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans, firmly refutes this "just-following-the-trend" hypothesis, and identifies striped bass predation as being the cause of the salmon's decline. Dr. Ritter's report has been circulating within your department for several weeks, and yet we have heard no reaction from them on its conclusions and recommendations.

We would like an immediate response to this letter, and not just a patronizing reply from one of your Gulf staff employees. We do not need platitudes or studies such as the ongoing smolt trap-and-truck delay tactic / defection effort, which could never be implemented as a solution to the predation problem and does not address the root ecological issue, or another Smolt-to-Adult-Supplementation research project. We need immediate action to control the striped bass population with a goal of bringing its level to 100,000 spawners, a level supported by Dr. Ritter's report, and a level which could be achieved by vigorously following your House Standing Committee's recommendations.

Sincerely,

John Bagnall, Fisheries and Licensing Chair, NBSC for:
Charlie Leblanc
President, the New Brunswick Salmon Council