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Intelligence

# Nova Scotia establishes compliance unit to tackle illegal seafood activity

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## Nova Scotia introduces new compliance unit, new audits and stronger penalties to address illegal seafood activity

Nova Scotia is establishing a new compliance unit to target illegal seafood activity in the province's fish-buying and processing sector, the government announced this week. The province says up to 30 percent of annual lobster landings in Atlantic Canada go unreported, representing as much as \$400 million (U.S. \$283 million) in unrealized taxable income for Nova Scotia.

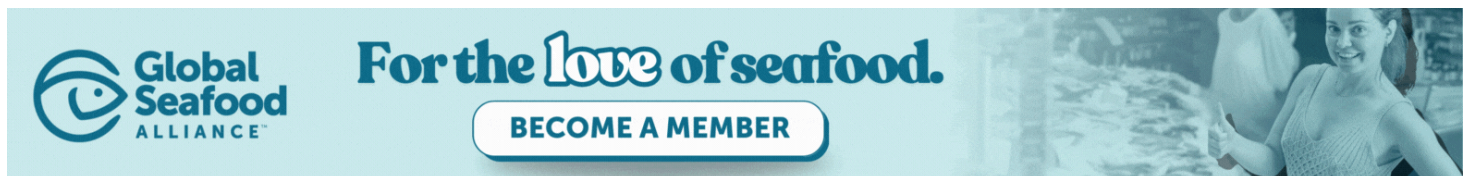
"Our new compliance unit will target illegal seafood-related activities that are negatively impacting the sustainability of our resources and the safety of our communities," said Kent Smith, Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. "As the regulator of the shore-based fish buying and processing sector, these inspectors will focus their activities on the wharves and in seafood facilities where illegal activities occur."

The unit will begin with four inspectors tasked with monitoring, inspecting and investigating regulatory compliance and responding to violations. They will coordinate with federal and provincial enforcement agencies, including conservation officers with the Department of Natural Resources. Enforcement actions may include fines, license suspensions, license revocations and formal charges.



Nova Scotia has launched a compliance unit with new penalties, audits and enforcement tools to target illegal seafood activity. Photo courtesy of the Province of Nova Scotia.

The province is also creating a new audit program and developing stronger penalties designed to reflect the seriousness of violations, including the potential suspension or termination of a fish buyer or processor license.



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“While most harvesters and buyers play by the rules, it has become clear in recent years that much more needs to be done to effectively deter and root out illegal or unreported transactions from our industry,” said Nat Richard, executive director of the Lobster Processors Association. “This requires urgent and collaborative actions by both levels of government. Nova Scotia continues to show the way forward with the deployment of this new compliance team.”

These new measures follow earlier steps by the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. The province has recently increased the maximum fines under the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act to \$1 million from \$100,000 for a first offense and up to \$2 million for a second offense. It has also modernized Fish Buyers and Fish Processors Regulations, adding clearer requirements for agents, designated buyers and processors.



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New license conditions now require enhanced reporting of buying data to support enforcement, and officials are examining improved traceability systems for lobster and snow crab, the province’s most valuable species. The department has hired a license compliance analyst to assess buyer and processor data and collaborate with enforcement agencies, and it has contracted a forensic accounting firm to conduct third-party audits of records from licensed buyers and processors. The province is also continuing to pursue cross-jurisdictional tools such as boat-to-plate traceability.

“Today’s announcement is a clear indication of the province’s continued commitment to ensuring a fair playing field for all enterprises operating in the seafood sector,” said Kris Vascotto, executive director of the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance. “A focused compliance unit will help stamp out illegal activity and boost the prosperity for all participants in the industry.”

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