

A new experiential fisheries tourism product is being developed with commercial fish harvesters in the Gaspé Region of Quebec. The project entails “commercial fishing for tourism purposes,” as it is limited to fishers holding a lobster licence. The initiative is being led by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and Economic Development Canada (DEC) in partnership with the professional fish harvesters’ group of the Southern Gaspé Peninsula. The pilot project will offer tourists in the region a chance to go on a fishing boat with an accredited fish harvester to catch some seafood. The harvester will share with them the culture and heritage of the coastal fishery on the Gaspé Peninsula. By encouraging new collaboration with the tourism sector the project aims to provide new approaches to ensuring the viability of lobster fishing on the Gaspé Peninsula.

The project has been developed in response to problems facing the Canadian lobster industry and the need to come up with sustainable economic development solutions for coastal communities. The partner organization identified a variety of species they wanted to be part of the commercial fishery for tourism purposes project for the 2011 season. These species include: snow crab, rock crab, lobster, halibut, and scallop. For lobster and snow crab, the fishery will take place outside of the normal fishing periods and will therefore require an impact assessment by biologists before the fishery is authorized. The scallop fishery is a dive fishery and will not be part of the pilot project. For cod and mackerel, these activities will be “chartering” rather than commercial fisheries for tourism purposes, and they will take place within the context of the recreational fishery.

The project is currently being implemented, and will be piloted for the first time this summer, with lobster. To ensure that the new initiative has no net effect on the resources and in order to improve the fit between the fishery and the tourism season, it is proposed that harvesters will place a certain number of lobsters in a pound during their regular season and release these when they begin the tourism project. They will then be allowed to catch the same number of lobsters in the tourism fishery as they release from the pound.

Harvesters have received some training in preparation for the pilot project. A partnership has been established with Groupe Collégia (adult education), which offers customized training. Their mission is to improve community development with quality training. The course offered to fishers included an introduction and overview of the tourism industry and communication techniques related to offering and promoting a product. The participants gained new knowledge that blended with their professional fishing know-how.

Preliminary work with Transport Canada has allowed them to establish the terms and requirements for harvester engagement in this fishery, notably safety certification, required permits and equipment, and information on applicable regulations and standards.