# Sector Profile

## Fishing and Fish Processing

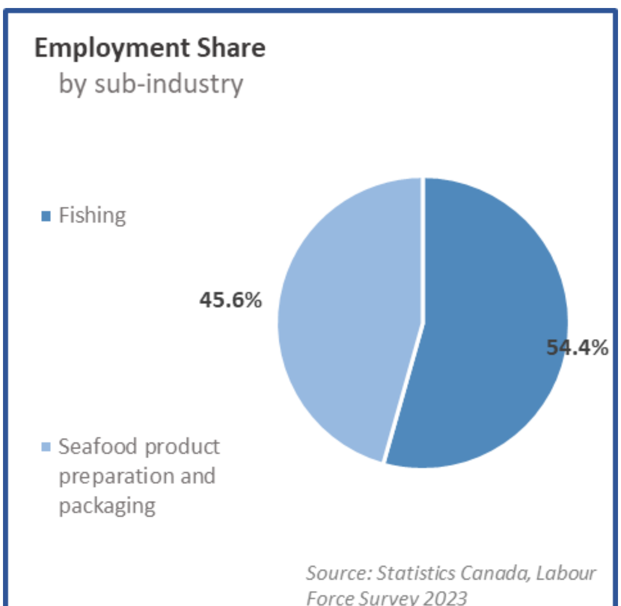
## Atlantic Region

## 2024

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The fishing and fish processing industry comprised 2.9% of Atlantic Canada's total economic output in 2023, at $2.5 billion.
- Nearly 8 in 10 workers in this industry are male. There is also a disproportionate number of older workers, with 34.6% of its job holders aged 55 and over compared to 23.4% in all industries.
- After reaching historic levels in 2021, both exports and employment related to fishing and fish processing have tailed off in each of the last two years.
- Looking forward to 2026, employment in the fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada is expected to decline slightly, by 0.4%. This is in contrast to employment growth of 1.8% across all industries in the region.

## ABOUT THE INDUSTRY




*Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey 2023*

### Composition and Importance of the Sector

The fishing and fish processing industry is comprised of two highly integrated activities: commercial fishing and seafood product preparation and packaging. The latter typically involves the addition of some value to seafood products through processes like portioning, canning, smoking, freezing and packaging.

The fishing and fish processing industry comprised 2.9% of Atlantic Canada's total economic output in 2023, at $2.5 billion. The industry is a cornerstone of the region's economy and culture, deeply intertwined with its history and heritage. The region is renowned for its rich marine resources, including lobster, snow crab, molluscs (i.e. mussels and oysters), as well as other fish species.

The industry's two subsectors: fishing; and seafood product preparation and packaging, employed 11,400 and 9,600 people in Atlantic Canada in 2023, respectively.

## Geographic Distribution of Employment

Nova Scotia has the highest level of employment in the fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada, with 9,500 jobs in 2023 (which made up 2.0% of the province's total employment that year). Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick employed 5,000 and 4,100 workers in the industry, comprising 2.1% and 1.1% of their employed workforces, respectively. Although Prince Edward Island maintains the fewest jobs in the sector in the region, the industry has the largest share of provincial employment at 2.7%.

In Atlantic Canada, the industry has particular importance in rural areas as economic activity is spread along the shores of the provinces.

| | Employed 2023 | Industry Share (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Atlantic Canada | 21,000 | 1.7% |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 5,000 | 2.1% |
| Prince Edward Island | 2,400 | 2.7% |
| Nova Scotia | 9,500 | 1.9% |
| New Brunswick | 4,100 | 1.1% |

*Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey*

# WORKFORCE

## Workforce Characteristics

The Atlantic Canadian fishing and fish processing industry is male-dominated, with its employment being composed of 77.4% males and 22.6% females in 2023. In comparison, the distribution across all industries in the region is 50.7% male and 49.3% female. Employment in the sector has a disproportionate number of older workers, with 36.4% of its job holders aged 55 and over compared to 24.0% in all industries.

The vast majority of workers in the sector are employed full-time, however, permanent employment is not as common as most other industries due to the seasonal nature of the industry. Part-time employment makes up 7.2% of the jobs in the industry, compared to 15.7% across the region's entire workforce. In 2022, temporary employees (i.e. seasonal workers) comprised 34.6% of jobs in the sector and another 23.4% were self-employed.

Jobs in this sector do not tend to have high educational attainment. In 2023, 29% of workers in the sector had not completed high school, compared to 7.6% across all industries. Only 6.3% of jobs in the industry were held by people with university degrees.

## Main Occupations

The two most common occupations in Atlantic Canada's fishing and fish processing industry belong to the fishing subsector, being fishermen/fisherwomen and fishing vessel deckhands. Fishermen/women operate fishing vessels (less than 100 gross tonnes) to pursue and land fish and other marine life. They are usually self-employed owner-operators of fishing vessels. Fishing vessel deckhands perform a variety of manual tasks on commercial fishing voyages, and maintain fishing vessels.

The largest seafood product preparation and packaging occupation is labourers in fish and seafood processing. Workers in this occupation are employed in processing and packaging plants and perform clean-up, packaging, material handling and other elemental activities related to fish and seafood processing.

| **Top 5 largest occupations** | Employed 2021 | % Share of Industry |
|---|---|---|
| Fishermen/women | 6,950 | 21.9% |
| Fishing vessel deckhands | 5,400 | 17.0% |
| Labourers in fish and seafood processing | 4,350 | 13.7% |
| Fish and seafood plant workers | 3,275 | 10.3% |
| Aquaculture and marine harvest labourers | 775 | 2.4% |

*Source: ESDC/Service Canada*

## RECENT HISTORY

The fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada is driven largely by the export market, which has fluctuated greatly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. After having plummeted in 2020, exports recovered by 2021 as lockdowns subsided. During 2021, international demand for lobster surged which pushed up the price for this product. China was the main source of the increased appetite for Atlantic lobster.

Lobster and crab, respectively, are the region's two most valuable species. The snow crab market experienced plunging prices in 2022 (by 60%), as a result of lower US consumer demand due largely to inflation pressures. The excess inventories put downward pressure on prices before having stabilized somewhat in 2023. Similarly, Atlantic lobster prices also declined in 2022 (by 30%) and have remained well below peak prices since.

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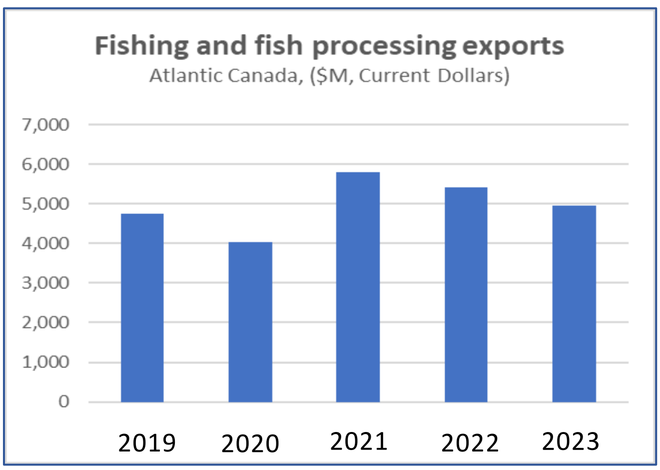
| Top-10 Export Destinations: Atlantic Canadian Fish Products 2023 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (fish and crustacean, mollusc and other aquatic invertebrate) | | | Share |
| United States | $ | 3,038,441,949 | 61.2% |
| China | $ | 1,002,038,468 | 20.2% |
| Japan | $ | 128,106,147 | 2.6% |
| Hong Kong | $ | 95,914,518 | 1.9% |
| Korea, South | $ | 87,582,581 | 1.8% |
| France | $ | 86,946,446 | 1.8% |
| Belgium | $ | 60,323,333 | 1.2% |
| United Kingdom | $ | 59,292,188 | 1.2% |
| Denmark | $ | 49,334,851 | 1.0% |
| Vietnam | $ | 44,298,297 | 0.9% |

Source: Trade Data Online, 2024

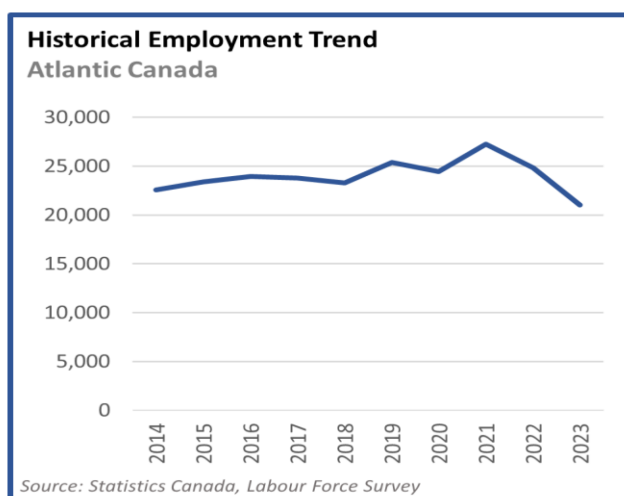



*Source: Trade Data Online, 2024*

Exports of fishing and fish processing products from Atlantic Canada have grown from $3 billion in 2014 to $5 billion in 2023. Significant growth in the sector's shipments to the US and China are the most prominent cause of the rise over the last decade. Global shipments (by value) peaked to historical highs in 2021, at $5.8 billion.

Employment in the fishing and fish processing industry is highly seasonal and subject to heavily regulated fishing seasons. Employment spikes in the industry coincide with the lobster fishing seasons, which peak in the spring (April to June) and again in December.

The industry's employment level hit a 10-year low in 2023 following a record high set in 2021. The decline is attributed to several factors, such as falling international demand for products like lobster. With the rising cost of food in recent years, some consumers are forgoing a luxury product like lobster in favour of cheaper protein options at the grocery store. Automation and technological advances have also improved efficiency for some unskilled labour positions, a necessary measure to help with the gap of people available to work these jobs. Indeed, the industry continues to struggle with attracting and retaining workers, particularly for labour intensive jobs in processing plants, resulting in unfilled job vacancies. With a limited labour pool, some jobs are going unfilled.



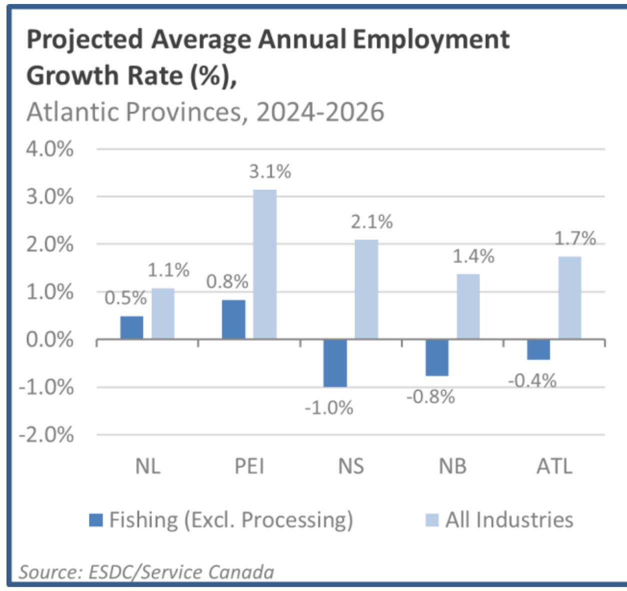
## OUTLOOK

Looking forward to 2026, employment in the fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada is expected to contract slightly, by 0.4%. This is in contrast to 1.75% growth in employment across all industries in the region. On the bright side, the recent lifting of a 30-year moratorium on redfish in the Gulf of St. Lawrence will present new fishery opportunities in the Atlantic Region.

The number of jobs in the fish and fish processing industry in Nova Scotia is expected to fall by 1.0% per year over the 2024-26 forecast horizon, and compares to growth of 2.1% for all industries. Following record lobster harvests in recent years, as well as strong global demand, harvests were down in 2023 and demand for exports has returned to pre-pandemic levels. As a result, some processors in the province have reduced activity. For example, after closing in 2023, a relatively new processing plant in Meteghan, NS, announced in early-2024 that the plant would remain closed permanently. The processing facility previously employed over 100 people.

New Brunswick is projected to experience an annual decline of 0.8% in fishing and fish processing employment between 2024-2026. This compares to a forecasted 1.4% growth rate across all industries in the province. Specifically, New Brunswick's lobster fishing and processing operations are expected to be negatively impacted by the US Government's decision to increase the minimum catch size for lobsters. From an export perspective, the increased size requirement negatively impacts all of Atlantic Canada's lobster fishing, but it is also impactful to New Brunswick's processors who processes the bulk of lobster imports from Maine.

The industry's employment level in Newfoundland and Labrador is expected to inch up by 0.5% during the 2024-2026 forecast horizon. The Federal Government recently lifted a three-decade long moratorium on cod fishing in the north and east coasts of the province. Northern cod was previously a vital part of the province's fishing industry, which has a 400-year history. Overfishing, poor resource management practices, and environmental changes resulted in the moratorium on cod fishing off Newfoundland and Labrador on July 2, 1992. The ban derailed the province's economy and negatively impacted the livelihoods of many coastal communities.




Employment in the fish and fish processing industry in Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.) is expected grow by 0.8% over the next three years, which is significantly less than the expected growth rate across all industries during this time (3.1%). P.E.I. processing plants continue to struggle with labour shortages and depend greatly on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to fill vacancies and maintain processing operations.

*__Note:__ In preparing this document, the authors have taken care to provide clients with labour market information that is timely and accurate at the time of publication. Since labour market conditions are dynamic, some of the information presented here may have changed since this document was published. Users are encouraged to also refer to other sources for additional information on the local economy and labour market. Information contained in this document does not necessarily reflect official policies of Employment and Social Development Canada.*

The analysis in this report was finalized as of August 2024.

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# APPENDIX

| Real GDP (2023) and Employment (2023) for Atlantic Canada | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Fishing and Fish Processing | | | All Industries | | |
| | Number | Share of Total | AAGR* | Number | Share of Total | AAGR* |
| Real GDP (M$) | $2,502.8 | 100.0% | -2.2% | $114,774.4 | 100.0% | 0.9% |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | $712.0 | 28.4% | -2.7% | $28,950.2 | 25.2% | -0.5% |
| Prince Edward Island | $247.6 | 9.9% | 1.0% | $7,267.1 | 6.3% | 2.5% |
| Nova Scotia | $1,021.5 | 40.8% | -2.8% | $43,765.1 | 38.1% | 1.5% |
| New Brunswick | $521.7 | 20.8% | -1.8% | $34,792.0 | 30.3% | 1.1% |
| Employment (000s) | 21.0 | 100.0% | -0.7% | 1210.0 | 100.0% | 0.8% |
| Male | 16.3 | 77.4% | -0.1% | 613.0 | 50.7% | 0.8% |
| Female | 4.8 | 22.6% | -2.5% | 597.0 | 49.3% | 0.8% |
| 15-24 years old | 1.9 | 9.0% | -0.9% | 161.8 | 13.4% | 0.8% |
| 25-54 years old | 11.5 | 54.6% | -1.2% | 765.4 | 63.3% | 0.5% |
| 55 years and older | 7.6 | 36.4% | 0.1% | 282.7 | 23.4% | 1.6% |
| Worked full-time | 19.3 | 91.8% | -1.0% | 1015.6 | 83.9% | 0.9% |
| Worked part-time | 1.7 | 8.1% | 3.2% | 194.4 | 16.1% | 0.2% |
| Self-employed | 6.2 | 29.7% | -1.6% | 124.5 | 10.3% | -0.7% |
| Employees | 14.8 | 70.3% | -0.3% | 1085.4 | 89.7% | 1.0% |
| Permanent job | 7.7 | 36.7% | 2.5% | 923.3 | 76.3% | 1.4% |
| Temporary job | 7.1 | 33.6% | -2.6% | 162.1 | 13.4% | -1.1% |
| Less than high school | 6.1 | 29.0% | -3.4% | 92.1 | 7.6% | -2.6% |
| High school graduate | 5.8 | 27.8% | -0.4% | 284.9 | 23.5% | -0.4% |
| Postsecondary cert. or diploma | 7.8 | 36.9% | 1.4% | 465.0 | 38.4% | 0.6% |
| University degree | 1.3 | 6.3% | 1.2% | 367.9 | 30.4% | 3.3% |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 5.0 | 23.6% | -2.1% | 236.8 | 19.6% | -0.1% |
| Prince Edward Island | 2.4 | 11.3% | 0.6% | 89.0 | 7.4% | 2.0% |
| Nova Scotia | 9.5 | 45.4% | 1.2% | 497.8 | 41.1% | 1.1% |
| New Brunswick | 4.1 | 19.5% | -3.4% | 386.5 | 31.9% | 0.8% |

*Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey - Custom Table; Table 36-10-0402-01*

**Average annual growth rate for last ten years of available data (GDP 2014-23 and Employment 2014-23)*