Sector Profile

Fishing and Fish Processing

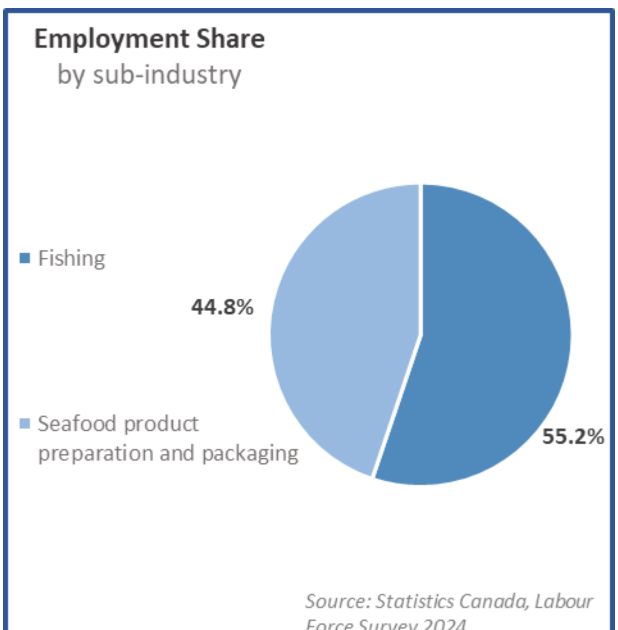
Atlantic Region

2025

HIGHLIGHTS

- The fishing and fish processing industry comprised 2.4% of Atlantic Canada's total economic output in 2024, at $2.9 billion.
- Nearly 7 in 10 workers in this industry are male. There is also a disproportionate number of older workers, with 37.8% of its job holders aged 55 and over compared to 23.2% in all industries.
- After reaching historic levels in 2021, both exports and employment related to fishing and fish processing tailed off in each of the last two years before showing some signs of rebounding in 2024.
- Looking forward to 2027, 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 0.9% across all industries in the region.

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY



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 2.4% of Atlantic Canada's total economic output in 2024, at $2.9 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 12,200 and 9,900 people in Atlantic Canada in 2024, respectively.

Geographic Distribution of Employment

Nova Scotia (NS) has the highest level of employment in the fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada, with 10,200 jobs in 2024 (which made up 2.0% of the province's total employment that year). Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and New Brunswick (NB) employed 5,600 and 3,400 workers in the industry, comprising 2.3% and 0.9% of their employed workforces, respectively. Although Prince Edward Island (PEI) maintains the fewest jobs in the sector in the region, the industry has the largest share of provincial employment at 3.1%, compared to the other provinces.

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

	Employed 2024	Industry Share (%)
Atlantic Canada	22,100	1.8%
Newfoundland and Labrador	5,600	2.3%
Prince Edward Island	2,900	3.1%
Nova Scotia	10,200	2.0%
New Brunswick	3,400	0.9%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

WORKFORCE

Workforce Characteristics

The fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada is male-dominated, with nearly three-quarters of its workforce comprised of males in 2024. In comparison, the distribution across all industries in the region is 50.9% male and 49.1% female. Employment in the sector has a disproportionate number of older workers, with 37.8% of its job holders aged 55 and over compared to 23.2% in all industries.

Most 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 6.4% of the jobs in the industry, compared to 16.0% across the region's entire workforce. In 2024, about 77% of workers were categorized as employees (which includes both permanent and temporary employees (i.e. seasonal workers)); and the remaining 22.8% were categorized as self-employed.

Jobs in this sector do not tend to have high educational attainment. In 2024, 23.7% of workers in the sector had not completed high school, compared to 7.0% across all industries. Only 8.9% of jobs in the industry were held by people with university degrees compared to 31.5% for all industries.

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 packaging, material handling and other elemental activities related to fish and seafood processing.

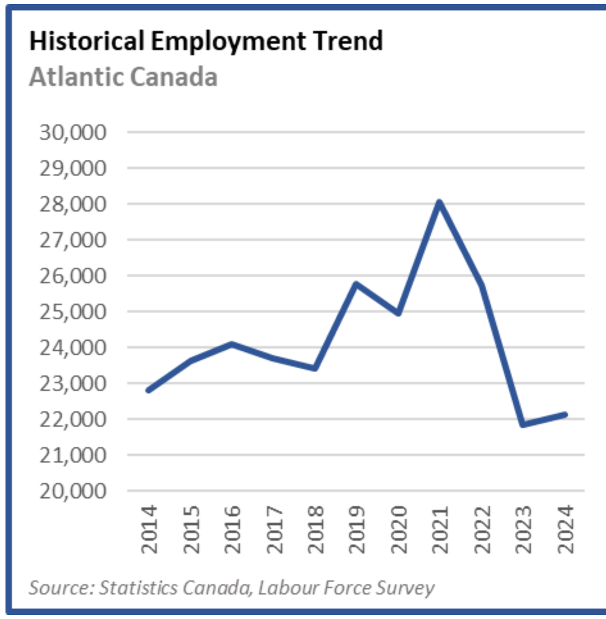
Top 5 largest occupations	Employed 2021	% Share of Industry
Fishermen/women	6,950	21.9%
Fishing vessel deckhands	5,400	17.0%
Labourers in fish and seafood processing	4,350	13.7%
Fish and seafood plant workers	3,275	10.3%
Aquaculture and marine harvest labourers	775	2.4%

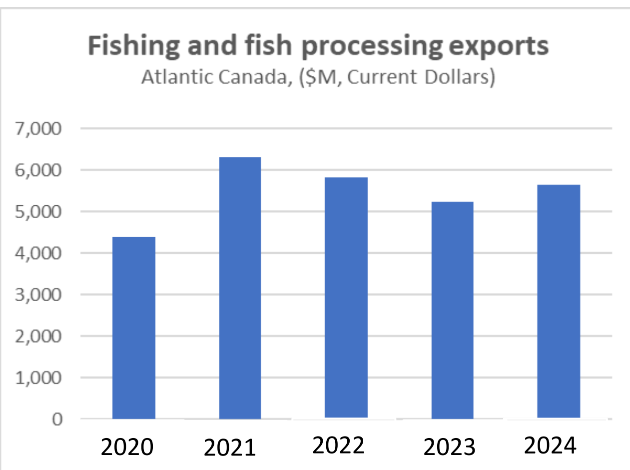
Source: ESDC/Service Canada

RECENT HISTORY

The fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada is driven largely by the export market, which plummeted during the pandemic year of 2020. Exports rebounded by 2021, during which time international demand for lobster surged, which pushed up prices. 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 by 2023. Similarly, Atlantic lobster prices also declined in 2022 (by 30%) and have remained well below peak prices since.





Trade Data Online, 2024

Exports of fishing and fish processing products from Atlantic Canada have grown from $3 billion in 2014 to $5.6 billion in 2024. 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 are staggered across the region's many fishing areas (i.e. peaking in the spring (April to June period) and again, later in the fall.

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, many employers continue to rely on the temporary foreign worker program to help fill vacancies. In 2024, employment levels in the industry slightly improved, up by 5.2% on a year-over-year basis.

Top-10 Export Destinations: Atlantic Canadian Fish Products 2024			
Fish exports - Value in Cnd $ (current dollars)			Share
United States	$	831,288,697	53.8%
China	$	469,063,513	30.4%
Japan	$	43,066,255	2.8%
Hong Kong	$	31,962,777	2.1%
Korea, South	$	27,331,997	1.8%
France	$	21,006,535	1.4%
Belgium	$	20,654,522	1.3%
United Kingdom	$	17,823,606	1.2%
Denmark	$	17,449,294	1.1%
Vietnam	$	15,390,436	1.0%

Source: Trade Data Online, 2024

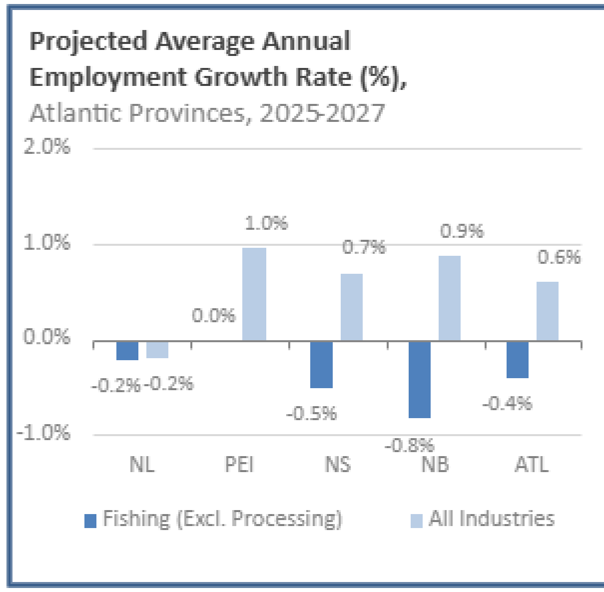
OUTLOOK

Looking forward to the 2025-2027 period, employment in the fishing and fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada is expected to contract slightly, by 0.4%. This is in contrast to 0.6% growth in employment across all industries in the region. The main factors limiting growth are tariffs, climate change and a limited labour supply. The industry is also affected by overfishing and illegal fishing practices. For example, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans estimates that 10-30% of lobster landings in the region are unreported. Authorities are working to map out criminal networks and money laundering in the sector. Unreported catches are estimated in the range of $176M to $681M annually.

The number of jobs in the fish and fish processing industry in NS is expected to fall by 0.5% per year over the 2025-27 forecast horizon and compares to growth of 0.7% for all industries. While catch volumes remain strong, climate change is moving the areas where lobster is being caught, with more work being found in the colder waters of the northern areas.

NB is projected to experience an annual decline of 0.8% in fishing and fish processing employment between 2025-2027. This compares to a forecasted 0.9% growth rate across all industries in the province. Herring levels have fallen in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and research suggests it could be linked to warmer waters. Fishermen in northern NB have had difficulty finding the fish, and experts believe the fish is moving to be in deeper, colder water.

The industry's employment level in Newfoundland and Labrador is expected to drop by 0.2% during the 2025-2027 forecast horizon. A study by the Marine Institute looking at the future of snow crab, flounder, and cod stocks indicates that a warming climate will have a significant impact in the coming decades. Snow crab is expected to decline by 60% on the Grand Banks while flounder is also expected to decline. Additionally, US tariffs are of heightened risk to crab fishers. The NL government attempting to alleviate this risk by investing $5.75M over the next 2 years to help the province's fishing industry explore diversified markets



in Europe and Asia. The US is a dominant buyer of N.L. snow crab accounting for about 90% of the total snow crab harvested in the province.

Employment in the fish and fish processing industry in PEI is expected to be flat over the next three years, while the growth for all industries in the province is expected to reach 1% annually during this period. PEI processing plants continue to struggle with labour shortages and depend greatly on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to fill vacancies and maintain processing operations. The most recent lobster season left local fishermen frustrated by low prices. The Lobster Fishers of PEI Marketing Board reported that fishers should be getting more than the current price of $6 to $7 per pound, which is the same rate received 18 years prior. The board is aiming to create more capacity to hold live lobsters on PEI and sell later in the season when prices improve. Additionally, PEI crab fishermen will be further limited by a 33% reduction in their allowable catch this year and a two-year extension was added to the herring moratorium.

__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 2025.

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APPENDIX

Real GDP (2024) and Employment (2024) for Atlantic Canada

	Fishing and Fish Processing			All Industries		
	Number	Share of Total	AAGR*	Number	Share of Total	AAGR*
Real GDP (M$)	$2,867.3	100.0%	-0.9%	$118,731.2	100.0%	1.2%
Newfoundland and Labrador	$883.9	30.8%	-0.6%	$29,645.2	25.0%	-0.3%
Prince Edward Island	$301.6	10.5%	3.0%	$7,604.7	6.4%	2.9%
Nova Scotia	$1,037.7	36.2%	-2.6%	$45,644.6	38.4%	1.9%
New Brunswick	$644.1	22.5%	0.3%	$35,836.7	30.2%	1.4%
Employment (000s)	22.1	100.0%	-0.3%	1258.7	100.0%	1.2%
Men+	16.2	73.3%	-0.2%	640.8	50.9%	1.2%
Women+	5.9	26.7%	-0.4%	618.0	49.1%	1.2%
15-24 years old	2.5	11.1%	1.6%	163.8	13.0%	0.9%
25-54 years old	11.3	51.0%	-1.4%	803.1	63.8%	1.0%
55 years and older	8.4	37.8%	0.9%	291.9	23.2%	2.0%
Worked full-time	20.7	93.6%	-0.4%	1057.5	84.0%	1.3%
Worked part-time	1.4	6.4%	1.3%	201.2	16.0%	0.5%
Self-employed	5.0	22.8%	-3.8%	119.1	9.5%	-1.1%
Employees	17.1	77.1%	1.0%	1139.7	90.5%	1.5%
Permanent job	8.7	39.5%	3.7%	967.1	76.8%	1.9%
Temporary job	8.3	37.7%	-1.1%	172.6	13.7%	-0.5%
Less than high school	5.3	23.7%	-4.9%	87.9	7.0%	-3.1%
High school graduate	6.9	31.0%	1.2%	286.9	22.8%	-0.3%
Postsecondary cert. or diploma	8.0	36.3%	1.6%	487.2	38.7%	1.1%
University degree	2.0	8.9%	5.3%	396.8	31.5%	4.1%
Newfoundland and Labrador	5.6	25.2%	-1.1%	245.0	19.5%	0.2%
Prince Edward Island	2.9	13.2%	2.7%	92.5	7.3%	2.3%
Nova Scotia	10.2	46.2%	1.8%	521.4	41.4%	1.6%
New Brunswick	3.4	15.3%	-5.3%	400.0	31.8%	1.1%

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 2015-24 and Employment 2015-24)*