



NEWS RELEASE

New Project Aims to Save Lives by Making Personal Locator Beacons Accessible to NL Fish Harvesters

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ST. JOHN'S, NL – Fish harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador are celebrating an important project that aims to make Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) accessible to all fish harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador. A collaboration between the Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Harvesting Safety Association (NL-FHSA), Fish Harvesters' Resource Centre (FRC), Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board (PFHCB), and the Fish Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor) will subsidize costs, making PLBs available to fish harvesters at 60 per cent of the full cost.

“The fishing industry in this province must be as safe as it possibly can be because one life lost at sea is too many. Every year in this province, fish harvesters lose their lives while at work and this is a problem worth solving,” says NL-FHSA Executive Director Brenda Greenslade.

Commercial fish harvesting is the most dangerous profession in the world. While improvements in safety have been made, loss of life caused by drowning or exposure continues to be the number one concern for those in the industry. Most fishing vessels are not properly equipped with reliable distress signalling technology, and it remains a fact that in most cases involving loss of life there is rarely a distress signal issued. However, there are numerous documented cases where a distress signal would have reduced search and rescue (SAR) response time and potentially saved lives.

PLBs are the size of a deck of cards and are easily carried on the crew members' person. The distress signalling capability and homing ability of PLBs allows for timely, efficient, and more cost-effective SAR response by the industry and government.

This project aims to make the life-saving technology more accessible to enterprise owners and their crew,” says Greenslade.

Fish harvesters interested in obtaining PLBs for their enterprise may [submit an application through the FRC's website](#), with delivery of PLBs expected to begin this spring.

QUOTES:

“Everyone thinks this will never happen to them but most every year in this province, harvesters are losing their lives at work. No one wants to see this happen and if we can help to prevent these tragedies by making personal locator beacons available and accessible to fish harvesters, then it is a problem worth solving. One life lost will always be one life too many.” - **David Decker, Chair of the NLFHSA**

“The biggest killer of fish harvesters in this province is drowning. It’s a dangerous job and experience will only get you so far. Once you go in the water, you have seconds to think about how you will stay alive. It doesn’t really matter where it happens if you can’t be found, and you can’t keep afloat.

There are two things every harvester needs on their person when they get in trouble on the water. The first chance you have at survival is if you are wearing a personal flotation device or life vest. The second chance you have is to have a personal locator beacon with you which will transmit your location. A PLB is your beacon of hope of being rescued as quickly as possible because your rescuers will know exactly where to pick you up.

This is the view shared by the Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Harvesting Safety Association (NL-FHSA), Fish Harvesters Resource Centre (FRC), Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board (PFHCB), and the Fish Food and Allied Workers (FFAW). That’s why we are working together on a campaign to get PLB’s on every fishing enterprise in this province.

We are committed collectively to providing resources and funding to assist fish harvesters access and purchase PLBs. This project will help to address the safety gap on reliable distress signalling in critical situations that currently exists in the industry and will ultimately save lives. In addition to saving lives, this will improve search and rescue and recovery efforts. We want to ensure fish harvesters have every means possible to help them return safely home.” - **Bill Broderick, Chair of the FRC and PFHCB**

“The fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador has a long history of tragedy where, over the years, many harvesters have been fatally injured or lost at sea while trying to make a living for themselves and their families. Improvements in safety are critical if these occurrences are to be eliminated. Personal locator beacons are one of the more recent life-saving technologies improving distress-signaling for fish harvesters who find themselves in situations requiring search and rescue. The FFAW is very supportive of partnering with the NL-FHSA, the FRC and the PFHCB to help fish harvesters access and avail of PLBs and, at the end of the day, be able to return safely home.” - **Keith Sullivan, President FFAW-Unifor**

“In July 2020 while fishing halibut with my buddy Todd Mclean we ended up in the water after our boat swamped and sunk off Sally’s Cove. Weather conditions had gotten worse throughout the day and after hauling aboard our last trawl the boat took a couple waves over the side and within seconds we were in the water. I was wearing a PFD and although Todd had his aboard he did not have enough time to put it on. We both held on to debris that floated from the boat and even though Todd was without his PFD he managed to hang on to the cover of a small insulated tub we had on board. Seas were rough at the time and it was hard for us to stay together. Todd was struggling to stay afloat and after a couple hours we drifted apart in heavy seas and tide. The incident happened in the early afternoon but it wasn’t until nearly noon the next day before I was picked up by coast guard. Coast guard was searching for us throughout the evening and night, I could hear and even see the helicopter but they could not see me. Even after daylight the next day I could see the coast guard vessel and helicopters for hours before they managed to find me. Unfortunately, by the time we found Todd it was too late. If we would have had PLB’s I think outcome would have been different. I would not have had to fight to survive in the ocean for 20 hours and I think Todd would have survived as well.” - **Dylan Mitchelmore, Fish Harvester (Green Island Cove)**

“I have been a fish harvester for close to 40 years and in my experience and involvement in search and rescue and recovery missions, time is everything when you have an emergency at sea. In this day and age, it is common practice for most large vessels to carry an EPIRB “Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon”, which send out a distress signal automatically. They are relatively cheap – only a few hundred dollars. With technology advancements, distress signalling devices are also available in a PLB – Personal Locator Beacon that can be carried by the individual harvester. We need to make sure that PLB’s “Personal Locator Beacons” are readily available to fish harvesters as a life-saving tool to alert search and rescue of their distress and transmit their location. But it’s not enough for harvesters to wear a PLB: they also need to be trained in their use; how to operate them effectively; know what to do when a PLB is activated; and how to efficiently find the fish harvester in distress. From the time the emergency happens, the clock is ticking and being able to quickly get a distress signal off that accurately pinpoints the location of a harvester in distress is everything when lives are at stake.” - **Glen Winslow, Fish Harvester (Shea Heights)**

“I am proud to work with many passionate and capable professionals and volunteers in Canada’s search and rescue system. Together, we stand ready to respond to people on the water whenever the need arises. We know first-hand that the waters around Newfoundland and Labrador can be dangerous, unpredictable, and unforgiving. We also know that preparedness and proper equipment can make all the difference when things do go wrong. In addition to precautions like wearing a flotation device and preparing a passage plan, the ability to signal for help in an emergency is crucial. Emergency beacons such as PLBs alert the SAR system when you are in trouble. And by providing your exact location, they can help take the “search” out of search and rescue. A properly registered beacon, carried in pocket so it’s readily available, could be the difference between finding someone alive, or not finding them at all.” - **Mark Gould, Regional Supervisor, Canadian Coast Guard Maritime Search and Rescue Sub-centre, St. John’s**

Facts:

- In Newfoundland and Labrador, more than 9,000 professional fish harvesters work on over 3,400 fishing enterprises. Over a ten-year period 2012 – 2021, 20 fish harvesters ended up in the ocean following an incident at sea (unexpected immersion from a small open vessel, a capsizing, or a vessel being abandoned on the command of the master) resulting in death from drowning or hypothermia. Five of the 20 harvesters were never recovered.
- The NL-FHSA will provide in-kind funding for the promotional portion of the *‘Bringing Fish Harvesters Safely Home - PLB’* campaign. Funding for the purchase of the PLBs is being provided by the FRC, PFHCB, and the FFAW-Unifor, and will be used to subsidize the purchase of one PLB per enterprise at a 60% rate.
- ⊖ Through a cost-sharing arrangement with fishing enterprises, the project is making a limit of PLBs available for purchase.
- The FRC will coordinate the purchase and sale of the PLBs. As the supply of PLBs is currently limited due to supply chain demands, the FRC will purchase the PLBs in 5 orders of 500 PLBs per order. The first delivery is expected during the first week of April 2022.

For media inquiries, please contact:

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Related links: www.nlfhsa.com

