

## DFO cuts to Science in NL/ Minister speaks with forked tongue

Written by Gus Etchegary

Friday, 11 June 2010 17:23 - Last Updated Friday, 11 June 2010 17:32

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Fisheries Minister Gail Shea, on a rare visit to St John's on June 11, 2010, officially opened a new "Aquatic Science Research Laboratory". (This is merely a refurbished part of the DFO building in White Hills.) Ms Shea [stated](#): "These state-of-the-art facilities will create new opportunities and creative partnerships with educational institutions and industry both domestically and internationally, and serve as an important recruiting tool for the best scientists and researchers."

What Ms Shea neglected to say was that in fact DFO Science in NL has suffered severe cuts in recent years.

1. The new Aquatic Science Research Laboratory which has in fact been open for a while will be under-utilized because retiring scientists in St. John's have not been replaced for a number of years.
2. In particular research specialists for cod, shrimp, lobster, yellowtail, capelin, scallops and turbot have not been replaced on retirement because of cost-cutting by the Department.
3. The Science Library at White Hills, vital for scientific research, has been closed for the last year and a half and it is doubtful it will ever reopen.
4. The Newfoundland based research trawl vessels have been reduced from 2 to 1. Only the Teleost remains; the Templeman has been cut from the programme.
5. The Teleost frequently breaks down because of the age of the vessel and lack of preventative maintenance by Coast Guard and replacement of the Newfoundland research vessels has been delayed time and again and is not expected any time soon.
6. Research programs in the region are currently being cut because of a shift in department priorities. For example, research on turbot has been cut and ecosystem research planned for next year has also been cut. There is no scientist working on turbot and there is only one scientist working on the ecosystem approach even though this is supposedly a priority because it forms the basis for the new "Ecosystem-based approach" to management.
7. A lack of properly trained technicians to go to sea to collect data is impacting the quality of the surveys. There is currently an exodus of technicians as those that were hired on at extension of jurisdiction are now reaching retirement age. Most retirees are not being replaced as a cost-cutting measure.

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8. The science budget for the White Hills has been cut by over two and half millions dollars. Morale among the scientific staff is at an all-time low as indicated by the results of a recent Public Service questionnaire. They feel sidelined as the Department concentrates on optics and media spin rather than fostering a sound scientific basis for decision making. Scientists are no longer allowed to talk to the media without first obtaining permission from Ottawa.

9. The northern cod scientific assessment was completed a number of months ago but the results have not been released to the public because the stock is not recovering. Scientists doing the assessment could not even get accurate catch figures because of the lack of monitoring and enforcement by other branches of DFO.

10. Foreign vessels in the offshore continue to fish illegally on Newfoundland cod as "bycatch" and misreport turbot catches and those of other species. Reports of DFO boardings and inspections are not made public and are not accessible under access to information.

This list merely scratches the surface. There is evidence everywhere that DFO is abandoning its fisheries management responsibilities in this province and particularly with respect to science and a groundfish resource recovery plan. There is nothing on the horizon in that respect. Additionally, there are reports from all over the world that Regional Fisheries Commissions such as NAFO are dismal failures.

The Harper government's commitment to, and then failure to implement, Custodial Management will make it very difficult to rebuild with the existing political and bureaucratic attitude in DFO/Ottawa.

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TAGS: Minister Shea, DFO Science cuts, White Hills, St. John's, Aquatic Science Research Laboratory, research trawlers cut, science staff cuts, science budget cuts, illegal fishing, bycatch, RFMOs, NAFO, ecosystem-based management, Custodial Management, fisheries, sustainable

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