

QUEBEC BUDGET: Good news for the railway

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – The Government of Quebec budget confirms the renewal of the five-year agreement conferred to the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie. The amount slated for 2023 to 2028 increases to \$21 million, from the \$12.5 million the transporter had received for the 2018-2023 period.

The money is used to support some operational costs of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), as well as some basic maintenance chores. It can also be used in certain cases to buy equipment.

It will also pay some transportation costs deriving from cement hauling between the Port Daniel cement plant and the New Richmond transshipment terminal. That cement should be loaded into rail cars in Port Daniel by 2024.

“It is contained in the 400-page budget document. The agreement is renewed. We were expecting it but it is always nice to see it officialized,” points out Éric Dubé, president of the SCFG, mayor of New Richmond and prefect of the Bonaventure MRC.

He is glad that the \$21 million breakdown is budgeted according to the needs of the SCFG.

“It will be \$6 million for the first year, which is this year, then \$6.5 million, followed by \$4 million, \$2 million and \$2.5 million. It was designed with a prevision view regarding the rehabilitation work we will have to carry out. We will have to clear snow over a longer distance once we reach Port Daniel. We will need additional equipment,” explains Mr. Dubé.

He underlines the fact that, since the fall, the SCFG has received a total of \$40 million, including an amount of \$19 million for the next three years, announced in November to increase the participation of the transporter in the rehabilitation process of the line. That recognition of expertise was much



More track upgrading work will revert to the SCFG in the coming years.

Photo: G. Gagné

appreciated by Éric Dubé and the staff of the SCFG, a corporation under the municipal control of the four MRCs covering the stretch between Matapédia and Gaspé.

“I can say that the next three years will be very busy, to sum up the situation,” he adds.

He hesitates before predicting a date for the termination of the line rehabilitation work between Caplan and New Carlisle, and then New Carlisle and Port Daniel.

“Work on the bridges located in Caplan-Saint-Siméon (Ruisseau-Leblanc), Bonaventure River and Port Daniel will likely be over by the fall. The work that has to be done on three small bridges will be handed out through the call for tenders process but the three contracts are supposed to last less than 26 weeks. Those calls for tenders should be awarded soon. The picture of the situation at the end of October might show that there is not a lot of work to do between Caplan and Port Daniel,” analyzes Éric Dubé.

The budgetary provision for 2024 and 2025 regarding the rehabilitation of the railway owned by Quebec’s Department of Transport calls for \$16 million of work yearly.

Éric Dubé is also confident to get an update before the end of the current spring about a

time frame for the return of rail services to Gaspé and a budgetary figure to carry out the work between Port Daniel and Gaspé.

Disappointed with housing and leisure envelopes

Meanwhile, Éric Dubé is disappointed by the Quebec government announcement re-

garding housing, as 5,300 affordable units will receive public support over the next five years. Most experts agree on the fact that Quebec needs more than 5,300 such units annually.

“We are anxious to see the details. We have a 15-unit housing project in New Richmond and we need \$3 million from the Quebec government,

\$1.2 million locally through a tax credit and \$2 million are awaited from the federal government. We hope our project will qualify. We need it,” he says.

The leisure infrastructure program was an equal disappointment, to say the least. During the fall electoral campaign, the Coalition avenir Québec incumbent government committed to investing \$1.5 billion over 10 years for arenas and other major leisure facilities.

“According to the budget, it is now \$150 million over five years. It is five times less than the electoral campaign commitment. It leaves \$30 million per year for all the leisure infrastructure of the province. It only covers a handful of projects annually,” says Éric Dubé.

The New Richmond municipal council opted for phases in the refurbishment of the local arena, hoping that public money would be available annually. Mayor Dubé now sees “hundreds of municipalities fighting for paltry sums.”

Eastern Alliance to enter the new call for tenders

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

SAINTE-ANNE-DES-MONTS - The Eastern Energy Alliance will respond to the new call for tenders for 1,500 megawatts of wind energy that Quebec is about to launch.

The Minister of Economy, Innovation and Energy, Pierre Fitzgibbon, announced on March 16 in Montreal that a call for tenders from Hydro-Québec for the 1,500 megawatt block will be launched shortly.

In February Quebec submitted for consultation a draft regulation for a call for tenders which was to be launched no later than March 31.

This energy block must be

connected to the main Hydro-Québec grid between December 1, 2027, and December 1, 2029, in areas where the electrical transmission network can quickly integrate new wind power.

In a map published by Hydro-Québec, 400 megawatts are possible in the Rivière-du-Loup region and 200 megawatts in the Montmagny region, the alliance’s playground.

“Browsing the map quickly, we see that there is still potential for the Eastern Alliance and rest assured that we will study it to see how far we can go via this tender,” says the president of the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands Intermunicipal Energy

Board and vice-president of the Eastern Energy Alliance, Simon Deschênes.

The alliance submitted six projects as part of the December 2021 call and three were selected, which leaves the possibility of re-submitting the others.

“We are going to study cartography. Have we put in greater powers to hope for larger wind farms where there is room for smaller projects? It is too early to comment. We already have projects in our boxes in the targeted areas. The work has been underway for several years and even more important since Wednesday and our team is hard at work,”

A rather unwelcome budget in the Gaspé Peninsula

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The Girard budget tabled on March 21 in the National Assembly receives mixed reviews in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Several elements are missing from the budget, while the announced tax cut may not be the best idea, according to some.

In the first chapter, the municipal world had high expectations to fight inflation and the housing crisis. "We are still living with the effects of inflation, which eats into municipal finances and increases the cost of infrastructure projects. Government financial assistance is not adapted to these new realities," comments the mayor of Gaspé and president of the Union of Quebec Municipalities, Daniel Côté.

The UMQ estimated the impact of inflation on municipal finances at \$1 billion and Mr. Côté warns that the budgets tabled next December will



Mathieu Lapointe, president of the region's Table of prefects.

Photo: G. Gagné

impose new significant increases in the tax bill.

"The government has made political choices to cut taxes. I respect that political choice but if we do not support the municipal sector to face the challenges of inflation, what the government saves on the one hand, we will seek it on the other hand at the municipal

level to provide services. It is an ideological choice of the government," says the mayor.

A meeting will be held quickly with the Minister of Municipal Affairs "because the financial situation of municipalities is untenable," adds Mr. Côté.

He still sees interesting news for regional development,

but it will have to be analyzed in detail.

The Regional Initiatives Assistance Fund (FAIR), unique to the Gaspé Peninsula with its \$8 million envelope for 2022-2023, does not appear in the budget, which worries the president of the Gaspé Peninsula Table of Prefects, Mathieu Lapointe.

"We had done a lot of political representation to maintain FAIR. We were told that the announcement would be made in the budget. It is not found in the document. We are waiting for answers from the Ministry of Economy and Innovation to find out what is happening with the FAIR, but for the moment, there is reason to worry because it is not found in the budget," declares Mr. Lapointe. The FAIR program was mentioned in the budget last year.

Some measures are added for housing, such as 1,500 social housing units for all of Quebec and assistance to renovate low rental housing, particularly in poor condition, in the Gaspé Peninsula, but this is too little in his eyes.

"The needs are so great that we would have liked a much greater involvement of the Government of Quebec to invest and support rental housing," says the president of the Table of prefects.

The prefect of the MRC of Bonaventure, Éric Dubé, however, sees a positive point in the budget since Quebec has reserved \$76 million for cellular service in areas not already covered.

"It's good news. This is an important aspect for our communities. There are many expectations in several municipalities of the MRC of Bonaventure. We will have to see how it unfolds, but that there are dedicated sums for that. It will be appreciated," he says. A dead zone in Saint-Elzéar had prevented sending an emergency alert to citizens of the municipality during a manhunt at the end of last summer.

Disappointment in healthcare

In healthcare, the disappointment is strong for the Union of nurses, nursing assistants and respiratory therapists of Eastern Quebec. Quebec announced a 7.7% increase in the budget, but according to the president, Pier-Luc Bujold, 5% is to cover system costs, which leaves only 2.7% to improve the network. "We find that it is clearly

insufficient," says Mr. Bujold.

"There is a scattering of money, in particular, in mental health with \$200 million. The latest report from the Auditor General of Quebec mentions that it takes \$2 billion for home care. We are very far from the mark. It would have taken more concrete measures with massive investments in public services," says the president, who criticizes the tax cut by the Legault government.

"We see the tax cut that eats away \$9.9 billion (over 5 years). It might have been the time to restore our public services to which the population is entitled and which are currently being undermined," says Mr. Bujold, who is worried about next year when the indexation announced would only be 3.3%.

Community sector concerned about tax cuts

The community sector welcomes the Girard budget with consternation. "People who make less than \$20,000 a year, i.e. nearly a third of the Quebec population, will suffer without any support for the effects of inflation. We can only be worried about the community organizations that will be affected first," says the Regrouping of Community Organizations for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands (ROCGÎM), in a press release.

Several measures were announced, notes the ROCGÎM, "but once in the region, there was very little to support the mission of community organizations."

For the Gaspesian Collective for a Quebec Without Poverty (Collectif gaspésien pour un Québec sans pauvreté), the warning against tax cuts did not pass muster.

For the collective, many things could have been done with all this money to stop the deterioration of public services and improve the conditions of people living in poverty.

"It's like being in a bad movie," complains the spokesperson for the collective, Jacinthe Leblanc. "The tax cut does nothing for the poorest, a little money for the middle class and the jackpot for the richest."

The collective intended to demonstrate on March 27 in front of the constituency office of the Coalition Avenir Québec Member of the National Assembly for Bonaventure, Catherine Blouin, in Carleton-sur-Mer.

\$2.4 billion in infrastructure over the next 10 years

Nelson Sergerie, LJI

GASPÉ - Quebec plans to invest nearly \$2.4 billion over the next decade, according to the projects included in the Quebec Infrastructure Plan tabled in the 2023-2024 provincial budget.

The most important project remains the repair of the railway line between Matapédia and Gaspé. So far, Quebec has spent \$104 million on the first two sections: Matapédia to Caplan and Caplan to Port-Daniel-Gascons.

In section 1, Quebec spent \$39.2 million to upgrade the rail; \$8.2 million is planned this year and \$7 million to complete it for a total of \$54.5 million.

In section 2, \$63.9 million was invested; \$16.6 million is recorded for the year 2023-2024 and \$16.6 million for the following five years.

No date or budget has yet been announced for the section between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé, which is still in the planning phase.

Also in transportation, the Gaspé Industrial Road, a project worth \$20 million, is included even though it is practically completed.

The new Quebec Ministry of Transport (MTQ) service centre in Gaspé is not in the document since it is finished.

In culture, the Villa Frederick-James in Percé, which is being converted to become the Gaspé Peninsula's Espace Bleu, is still listed at \$20.8 million, even though the Société québécoise des infrastructures indicated in December that the project was now valued at \$25.5 million.

In research, the Grande-Rivière Fisheries and Aquaculture Innovation centre is in the document for a total project of \$31.2 million: \$2 million is planned for this year and \$19 million after 2024, in addition to the contribution of \$8.9 million from partners.

In health, the Rivière-au-Renard Seniors' Centre will be completed this spring with \$2.8 million to be injected to complete the work. The project will ultimately cost \$40.5 million rather than the \$30 million originally budgeted.

The expansion and renovation of Villa Pabos also appears there with a sum of \$60 million, including \$8 million this year for its preparation. Two million dollars was already advanced. The latest estimates value that project at \$70 million. The Quebec government and the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre are working to try to reduce the cost of the project.

In education, the reconstruction of New Carlisle High School is still in the planning stage. The project was announced in September 2021 at a cost of \$32 million.



The 176-page document presenting Quebec's investment plan for the next 10 years.

UMQ calls for federal support for bus transportation

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The Union of Quebec Municipalities is lobbying Ottawa to better support intercity bus transportation and is calling for the federal government to finally get involved in air transportation.

Union president and mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, appeared before the Standing Committee on Transport on March 7 to ask Ottawa to fund bus transportation when the industry is undergoing numerous service cuts or when, in other cases, the service is simply axed in some parts of rural Canada.

"We have asked Ottawa to also invest in intercity bus transportation. Ottawa invests in public transit, mainly in large urban centres, but we hear very little of intercity bus transportation," says Mr. Côté.

The president says that it is a question of money and senses a form of openness from the federal government. "If they do it, they have to do it the right way, taking into account regions like ours where it is an essential service. Ottawa could start by removing consumption taxes. We don't pay taxes on public transit tickets. So why are we paying taxes on intercity transportation? It's not considered an essential service when it should be," suggests Mr. Côté.

Groups from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador were among those attending the committee meeting at the House of Commons and Mr. Côté said their message was the same.



Federal funding requested for bus transportation by the Union of Quebec Municipalities. Photo: N. Sergerie

"We need money to ensure the sustainability of the service because we have lost ridership, and the transit authorities have lost revenue. If we want it to continue, we have to invest," says the UMQ president.

"If there is financial support to be offered, it is in the more regional lines where there is less clientele or in the places that have suffered the greatest losses in ridership. Some places have lost service completely. It's zero. In the Gaspé Peninsula, we've lost a lot, but in some places, they've lost everything," states Mr. Côté.

In 2016, the Gaspé Peninsula lost two-thirds of the service offered by Orléans Express. The number of daily departures between the Gaspé Peninsula and Rimouski was reduced from six to two, and the number of stops from 45 to 11. The Percé service was abolished, which was widely criticized at the time.

However, after negotiations, Keolis, the parent company of Orléans, agreed to resume the link to Percé and add additional stops, in exchange for a contribution of \$37,500 from the five Gaspé

MRCs and a contribution from Quebec for a total amount of \$150,000. The agreement is renewed year after year.

Air transportation

Although the subject was not on the agenda of the Standing Committee on Transport, Daniel Côté raised the issue of air transportation, which has been experiencing turbulence in Quebec for several months.

The UMQ president attempted to make his point, without success. "But my ball dropped in thin air and nobody dared to answer the question of air transportation. You will tell me that this was not the subject of the consultation? But, on the other hand, I was addressing the Standing Committee on Transport and the committee does not seem to be dealing with regional air transportation," says the elected official.

He warned Ottawa. "At some point, someone in Ottawa will have to deal with it. It's a federal jurisdiction and the feds are silent. I can't wait for them to take care of this file," says Mr. Côté, who notes that Quebec seems willing to respond to the issue.

Chandler councillor receives death threats

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - Chandler town councilman, Raynald Leblanc, filed a complaint with the Sûreté du Québec after receiving death threats in connection with the ongoing saga surrounding Adrenaline Rescue.

On the evening of March 19, Mr. Leblanc was leaving his house when he received death threats.

According to our information, these threats are linked with the firing of Dominique Giroux, from her position as manager of the Chandler aquatic complex in connection with Adrenaline Rescue.

The councillor confirmed



Councillor Raynald Leblanc

Photo: N. Sergerie

that information but does not want to go into further information since an investigation is underway.

According to what we

learned, the accused was questioned by the police and was released under the promise to appear at the Percé courthouse, but the Sûreté du Québec was not able to confirm this information.

"It is worrisome for all of us. We are part of a whole and we proved at the last meeting that we had a consensus on the decision we made. With what happened on Sunday, we all have a certain fear of being attacked or something like that," says Chandler Mayor Gilles Daraïche.

The head of the aquatic department, Dominique Giroux, was fired on March 13 at a special meeting of the town council when the report com-

Police report

Amqui resident Simon-Guillaume Bourget, 41, who was originally from Gaspé, succumbed to injuries at a Quebec City hospital on March 19. He was one of the 11 people who were struck by a pickup truck on March 13. Simon-Guillaume worked at a gardening centre in Amqui which was located along the path of the deadly truck attack. Simon-Guillaume is the son of Sylvio Bourget, a well-known Gaspé resident who has often organized humanitarian missions.

The vehicle involved in the attack was allegedly driven by Steeve Gagnon, 38, from Saint-Léon-le-Grand in the Matapedia Valley, who currently faces two charges of dangerous driving causing death. The first two victims were Gérald Charest and Jean Lafrenière. The accident took place shortly after 3 p.m. on Saint-Benoit Boulevard in downtown Amqui, on a sunny and mild afternoon. Steeve Gagnon, a transport truck driver who was on sick leave, turned himself into the Sûreté du Québec a few minutes after the tragedy. As of March 24, one person remained in an intensive care unit in a Quebec City hospital.

The Sûreté du Québec investigation is ongoing and Steeve Gagnon is likely to face additional charges, including hit and run. He will be remanded into custody until his next court date which is scheduled in April.

The charges laid against Saint-Elzéar resident, Steve Soucy, 50, were withdrawn by the criminal prosecutor on March 17 at the New Carlisle Courthouse. He was charged with uttering death threats and causing injuries, possession of a weapon without a permit, possession of a weapon for a purpose dangerous to public safety and possession of a firearm while he was prohibited to do so. Criminal prosecutor Cédric Leblanc-Falardeau explains that if the case had gone to trial it would have proved difficult to find Mr. Soucy guilty. "We no longer had enough evidence to stand a chance of proving that he had committed the offences for which he was initially charged. A witness was no longer ready to testify," explains Mr. Leblanc-Falardeau. The event he is referring to took place in Saint-Elzéar on September 2.

On March 17, Steve Soucy entered a plea of guilty on another charge, driving while his licence was suspended. Judge Janick Poirier sentenced him to an 18-month prison term. Considering the time already served since September, he had 250 days left to spend in jail as of March 17. Ariane Cayer of Chandler was the defence attorney in that cause. At the time of his arrest, Steve Soucy already had a criminal record linked to a series of break and enters perpetrated in 2018 and for which he served a 30-month prison term.

David Guy, 39, from Maria charged with assault causing bodily harm, will return to court on April 24 for the orientation and declaration procedure step pertaining to his case. He returned to the New Carlisle Courthouse on March 13, but Quebec Court Judge Janick Poirier postponed the case. In custody since March 2021 after being charged with assault causing bodily harm to his wife, David Guy allegedly attacked an inmate at the New Carlisle prison in 2022.

He currently is serving a four-year prison sentence after entering on August 12, 2022, a plea of guilty on charges of assault with a weapon, assault causing bodily harm, uttering death threats and breach of conditions against his former wife who was abused over a period of 17 years. She died in Rivière-du-Loup of natural causes, in her sleep, five days after Mr. Guy pleaded guilty.

missioned on the administrative audit related to Adrenaline Rescue was tabled at the council meeting.

The town did not comment on its contents as the dismissal could be challenged and the document could be referred to in future proceedings.

On March 6, about 40 citizens attended the town council meeting to support Dominique Giroux, who was suspended at the time, in the dispute between the town and Adrenaline Rescue, about the free services provided by the organization in which Ms. Giroux was an administrator.

The agreement provided

for four activities for sponsors of Adrenaline Rescue, which purchases equipment and provides training to Chandler's lifeguards. However, it was revealed that the freebies were extended to the entire sports complex.

The mayor stated at the council meeting that he never questioned the work done by Adrenaline Rescue, but he mentioned that questions were raised by some people and that led the council to investigate the matter.

In February, the council suspended the freebie program while it investigated the matter.



Gilles Gagné

Commentary

A Quebec budget that forgot about social issues

Quebec Finance Minister Éric Girard's fifth budget comes across as an exercise to fulfill an election promise, with the exception of a couple of details, as if there was going to be an election campaign in 2023. His government's main highlight consists of the \$1.7 billion income tax reduction for the population, which fills a commitment made last fall during the real electoral campaign.

However, there won't be an election campaign in 2023. Moreover, a few of the Coalition avenir Québec's best allies expressed opposition toward tax income reduction. For example, the Quebec Employers Council was opposed to such a reduction in a time when there are serious housing and labour shortages.

For a change, the Quebec Employers Council's position was exactly the same as that of the left-wing party Québec solidaire on the relevance of waiving an income tax reduction to favour housing and labour.

The CAQ government's position on the housing crisis is hard to understand. It took Quebec Premier François Legault and his cabinet three-and-a-half years before admitting that there is a "problem", the word used instead of "crisis" by the then minister in charge of housing, Andrée Laforest.

The housing measures included in the March 21 budget will likely curtail much less than 20% of the needs identified in social housing, which is not the electoral clientele of the CAQ.

As mentioned recently by Premier François Legault, this government thinks that the private sector will solve most of the housing "problem". They are dreaming in technicolour. The cost of building materials has skyrocketed since the covid pandemic and inflation is also contributing to high prices. Secondly, the cost of land is also going up in price.

The private sector will find a market for costly condominiums and top-of-the-class apartment buildings, but nothing for the 30-40% cross section of the population needing affordable housing, including individuals with low incomes trying desperately to make ends meet and young workers

who are starting out in life, with a fair salary but who have tens of thousands of dollars to pay in student debt.

The tax break announced by Minister Girard will apply to the current fiscal year. Its cumulative effects will consequently be felt mostly at the end of 2023 and in 2024. A citizen earning \$98,450 will benefit from a break of \$814 while a worker getting a salary of \$40,000 will get a \$210 break. In a way, it means that the government thinks an executive with a high salary, earning more than \$100,000, and qualifies for the income tax break, needs four or five times more support to deal with inflation, than a store cashier only earning \$30,000. Is that fair, Minister Girard?

One-third of Quebecers don't earn enough to benefit from the income tax break. They were forgotten in the 2023 budget because a few measures applied last year were designed for them, affirmed Minister Girard.

That was thinking quickly and not wisely. The CAQ government seems obsessed with the fact that the citizen's average income of Ontarians is above that of Quebecers. Quebec has caught up over recent years but Premier Legault really wants to match Ontario's average income.

How will he achieve it without taking into account the potential contribution of over 30% of the population? It looks like a very long shot.

Moreover, the citizen's average income is one thing. Disposable income is another thing. Who in Quebec would like to pay the rates of Ontario's daycares? Medication also costs much more in Ontario, while Quebecers can count on public health insurance. Tuition for college and university in Ontario is also more than double that of Quebec's. The cost of housing and land is also exorbitant in Ontario, which affects the disposable income of that province's citizens to a great extent.

Minister Girard never mentioned those aspects during his budget presentation, no more than he underlined the fact that Quebec's progressive income tax calculation is fairer than that of other provinces. He strictly put emphasis on the fact that Quebecers' tax rate is higher than in other provinces because he wanted to justify the income tax break given to a part of the population. He had to prove that our fiscal system is an ogre.

Truth be told, the cross section of the population targeted by Minister Girard is significant, as it reaches 4.6 million people. However, the largest

part of those taxpayers will recover less than a hundred dollars over a year, and will likely lose it in one month due to the rising cost of their rent stemming from the housing crisis.

Reducing people's income tax was the easiest thing to do while the question is whether it was the most responsible thing to do. It was not.

Quebec, like other provinces, came out with the short end of the stick following the negotiation sessions with the federal government over the necessity to increase Ottawa's transfers for the health sector. Officially, Quebec will get close to \$1 billion for 2023-2024, a disappointing sum considering that François Legault was asking for six times more.

A deeper look at the situation reveals that, in fact, Quebec will only receive a net increment of \$516 million this year, when the amount stemming from the previous agreement is deducted.

It is therefore not surprising that Minister Girard put very little emphasis on the "modest" portion of the federal contribution to health care, "modest" being the word he used. The negotiation with the federal government was a staggering failure on the provinces' part and François Legault's government hates to be reminded of that reality.

At the same time, the current budget's orientation almost justifies Ottawa's stinginess. Why ask Justin Trudeau for money, for the health system that is in such dire need, when Quebec is in a position to provide a tax break to its highest paid workers?

Quebec is earmarking \$59 billion for health services in 2023-2024, out of a total budget of \$138.4 billion. It is 7.7% more than last year for hospitals, CLSCs and other health-related institutions, however, the health sector "system's cost" increases by about 5.5% annually, which leaves very little wiggle room for service improvements.

Moreover, Minister Girard plans a paltry 2.1% hike in the health budget's ensuing year budget, despite that 5.5% annual system cost. He has a year to readjust that planning and will probably deal with more revenues than expected, due to inflation, as was the case last year and this year.

We assess the value of a society according to its ability to care for poor and vulnerable people. The budget tabled by the CAQ government forgot about that portion of the population and will likely yield poor results if put under scrutiny a year down the road.

The Gaspe Spec

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Local fisherman asks the federal government to impose measures on mackerel imports from the United States

GILLES GAGNÉ

SAINT-GODEFROI – Gaspesian fisherman, Jeffrey Vautier, thinks that the federal government should impose a minimum fish size for imports of mackerel coming from the United States, considering that a moratorium blocks commercial catches of that species in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and the rest of Atlantic Canada. He believes the current context is unfair and detrimental to the resource.

The depleted state of the stock caused the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans to impose a moratorium on mackerel catches at the end of March, 2022, just days before the season was set to begin.

That fishery is notably important for lobster and snow crab fishermen, as mackerel is the preferred type of bait. It is also processed and used for human consumption.

The March 2022 decision by Fisheries and Oceans Canada also put a halt to the spring herring fishery, because of the state of that stock as well.

A small herring quota was allotted for the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence from mid-August to mid-September but that quota represented only a small fraction of the quantities of 20 years ago.

“The mackerel coming from the United States is part of the same stock as ours but there is no moratorium down there. In the United States, there is also no minimum size for the mackerel caught. Here, it is 268 millimetres (26.8 centimetres). The American fishermen keep everything, no matter the size. However, when we sell sea products to the Americans, we can’t send fish smaller than their legal size,” remarks Jeffrey Vautier.

The mackerel moratorium lasted all year and is extended until this year at least. In the meantime, American mackerel is bought by the regional processing plants supplying bait to Gaspesian and Magdalen Islands fishermen.

“We are trying to rebuild our mackerel stock. We would like the Americans to lower their quotas or stop fishing, like us, but we can’t tell them what

to do,” he adds.

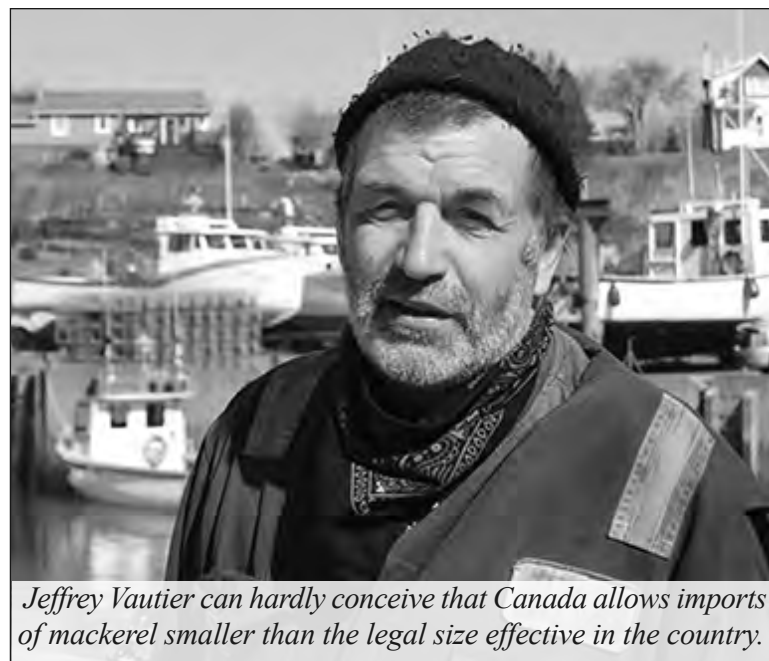
Mr. Vautier lives in Shigawake. As a lobster fisherman, he is mainly based in Saint-Godefroi and catches other species along the south shore of the Gaspé Peninsula.

Mackerel and herring stand out because they do not have a high landing value: several million compared to a Quebec total of \$406 million for snow crab (\$197M) and lobster (\$209M) in 2022.

Jeffrey Vautier fears a precedent

Besides human consumption, the use of herring and mackerel as bait for the most lucrative fisheries allows the processing plants and the fishermen to be independent.

“We have to keep our independence regarding bait because so much more depends on it. Last year was the first year in Canadian history that mackerel all came from foreign countries. Last year, 80% or more of herring catches were kept for bait. It also means very little quantities were kept for human consumption. If the



Jeffrey Vautier can hardly conceive that Canada allows imports of mackerel smaller than the legal size effective in the country.

Photo: G. Gagné

Canadian government is serious about protecting the mackerel stock and harvesters, they will ban all imports of fish under the legal size here in Canada,” sums up Jeffrey Vautier.

Mr. Vautier has also been an advocate for seal hunting in Eastern Canada, given the astounding amounts of fish they consume. A study released in 2021 says that seals eat about 12 times the volume of herring caught by the fishermen. Pre-

duction coming from fishing is responsible for approximately 5%, while seal consumption is responsible for the other 60%. “We don’t know exactly the percentages in the case of mackerel. When we see a bunch of mackerel at sea, we see seals for sure,” he adds.

The period during which the scientific fishery is carried out could influence the results of studying the proportion of mackerel eaten by seals, adds Jeffrey Vautier.

Mackerel stock at 10% of healthy biomass level, says biologist

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – According to Fisheries and Oceans Canada biologist Elizabeth Van Bereven, eight or nine years will be needed to rebuild the stock before the mackerel fishery resumes in Atlantic Canada. However, despite the depleted stock, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the ministry will maintain its ban on mackerel fishing for such a long period.

The mackerel fishery was closed in all sectors of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and part of the Atlantic Ocean included in Canadian waters at the end of March 2022. The duration of the closure is not yet specified. The closure involves catches for both human consumption and for bait. Recreational and aboriginal landings are excluded from the closure. It affects mackerel fishermen from Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland.

“The biomass tonnage figure is a number I don’t like to give at this point because my

report was submitted to the management division (of Fisheries and Oceans Canada) and it has not been approved yet. (...) I can say for now that when the stock was in good health, the biomass was 10 times greater,” stresses Elizabeth Van Bereven.

“The last assessment report was finished on February 20, taking into account the 2022 data collected by the scientific team,” she adds.

For every species they study, the scientific team of Fisheries and Oceans Canada determines a threshold that specifies if the stock is in a good state or not. When the stock goes under the threshold, there is room for concern about the eventual health of the species.

“Since 2011, the mackerel stock has been below the critical threshold,” points out Ms. Van Bereven. She says that quota determination is decided by the ministry’s management, not the scientific team, which only submits recommendations.

“There are two mackerel

stocks in Eastern Canada. The northern stock breeds in Canada before moving to the United States. The southern stock spends some time here but it breeds in the United States. The two stocks get mixed in the United States. The Americans fish in a mixture of the two stocks,” she explains. Stock assessment takes place every second year in Canada. “It’s a lot of work. Stock statuses do not change significantly from one year to another,” concludes Ms. Van Bereven.

Overfishing

Lobster, mackerel, herring and halibut fisherman, Jeffrey Vautier, has seen a lot of things in close to 40 years on the sea. He remembers that the recruitment of mackerel, which is when a fish reaches a commercial size, was outstanding in 1999.

“The last big recruitment year took place in 1999 and it was overfished until 2011,” he points out.

He adds that he saw a lot of

small mackerel over the last couple of summers, which could be a source of hope over the long term. “We have to leave the fish spawn to give them a chance to survive though,” adds Mr. Vautier.

He is not alone in his request to ask the federal government to impose measures allowing only mackerel measuring 26.8 centimetres, the legal size for Canadian catches, to be imported to Canada from the United States. Mackerel fishing is still active along the eastern coast of the United States.

“There are fishermen associations from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland that agree with that position. We will send documents to Ottawa at the beginning of April,” he concludes.

The pelagic fish sector is without doubt, along with cod for groundfish, the most worrisome area of commercial fishing in Quebec. Between 2021 and 2022, total catches, already half of those in 2015, fell from 4,485 to 4,019 metric tonnes, a

decrease of 10.3%. Revenue followed an even steeper downward trend, dropping from \$3.21 million to \$1.93 million, a 39.8% drop between 2021 and 2022.

Due to the moratorium, mackerel catches, worth \$910,000 in 2021, were not recorded last year. There remained \$1.84 million for herring and \$93,000 for capelin.

The value of catches on the North Shore reached \$1 million, compared to \$900,000 in the Gaspé Peninsula for the two species.



Pelagic species stocks have been declining for years, including both mackerel and herring (photo).

Photo: G. Gagné

Lobster fishing in the Gaspé Peninsula: right whale protection measures postponed by the Americans

GILLES GAGNÉ

SAINT-GODEFROI – American authorities are postponing increasing protection measures for right whales and other marine mammals that they intended to impose on Canadian coastal fishermen, including Gaspesian lobster fishermen.

The reason is simple: authorities in the United States cannot process all compliance requests from countries wishing to respect the new standards regarding right whales and other types of marine mammals covered by the Marine Mammals Protection Act.

“The Americans notified us in early December that they were suspending the entry into force of new protective measures. They have to process 132 compliance requests from 132 different countries,” says O’Neil Cloutier, director general of the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie.

This organization represents the 156 lobster licence holders in the Gaspé Peninsula. In 2022, the proportion of lobster fishermen carrying out trials with two types of fishing gear: a sleeve or weak link and a ring, yielding to a tension greater than 1,700 pounds, was at 30%.

Thus, a hypothetical right whale entangled in lobster fishing gear in the Gaspé Peninsula would be released as soon as it applied a tension greater than 1,700 pounds. This is a hypothetical theory since according to lobster fishermen no right whale has frequented the lobster fishing grounds along the coast of the region according to the memory of a lobster fisherman.

However, the decision of the American authorities does not divert the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnelles du sud de la Gaspésie (RPPSG) from its objective of increasing its degree of preparation countering the possible demands of the American authorities.

“This year, we are aiming for 50% (of use of the weak link and the ring) even if the Americans have decided to postpone the imposition of additional measures. We will be more ready when they increase their demands. They also decreed a moratorium on the use of new equipment, in this case, the traps without cables for the crab fishermen,” notes O’Neil Cloutier.

The RPPSG, or Southern

Gaspé Professional Fishermen Group, has three crabbers in its ranks fishing the allocations that have been granted to it continuously for several years. Two of these three crab fishermen were expected to test the new cableless traps this year.

“The requirement for the use of these wireless traps is postponed until 2028. There will be trials in Quebec with wireless traps. Strategically, it’s not bad because there, as well, we will be ready. Currently, our two selected fishermen are waiting for the equipment,” says Mr. Cloutier.

No contact with right whales

He finds it a little unfair that Gaspesian lobster fishermen find themselves at the heart of right whale protection measures as intense as lobster fishermen whose working conditions are very different.

“The lobster boats never go far out to sea in the Gaspé. Some of our lobster boats operate 10 minutes from the wharf! We will never see a right whale. On the American east coast, the lobster fishery is very different. Boats go far out to sea. American fishermen fish 10 months a year. We showed it to the minister (Joyce Murray, Fisheries and Oceans) during her visit to Gaspé (on March 1 and 2). I am convinced that apart from here and in Cape Breton, where the fishery is very, very inshore, the lobster boats go much further offshore. Even in the Magdalen Islands, there are lobster fishermen who spend three hours at sea to get to their fishing spot. We have a member here who fished in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, and also had to go three hours from shore,” says O’Neil Cloutier.

Reconciliation Agreement

On the other hand, he wants the Regroupement to be consulted when the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans assigns First Nations the ability to catch lobster as part of reconciliation agreements with aboriginal people. The allocation in the spring of 2022 of a fall lobster fishery in Listuguj without any consultation has left a bitter taste among lobster fishermen.

“Last year, they made official this fishery started in 2021 which was to be a pilot project



O’Neil Cloutier is relieved to see that Gaspesian lobster fishermen will not be forced to increase right whale protection measures in 2023.

Photo: N. Sergerie

allowing them to assess the relevance or otherwise of a fall catch. It became a commercial fishery in 2022. They declared the fishery official, without consultation. We thought it was limited to Listuguj. They (Fisheries and Oceans Canada) authorized it, as food, social and ceremonial fishing in Gesgapegiag. We found out almost by accident. This means adding 50 new traps over 10 weeks during the spring commercial fishery. It is shared between several permits of three traps,” notes O’Neil Cloutier, disappointed by the federal government’s “lack of transparency,” he adds.

“Fishing for social and ceremonial food, we are told that it is negotiated from nation to nation, between Gesgapegiag and the federal government. It is less damaging than fall fishing. It is a new type of fishing. This is the surprise we have. We are waiting for Gespeg now. The band chief of Gespeg (Terry Shaw) mentioned during the minister’s visit (Murray, March 1 and 2) that they were studying a proposal. He mentioned that there had to be more money involved. For us, it’s the sadness of the element of surprise. We are not part of the other nation. We have no right to be represented. However, we have worked very hard to save this resource,” says Mr. Cloutier.

“We agree to settle or try to settle disputes and agree with the reconciliation process. We do not agree when it is only the fishing community that pays in the current context. We all want to fish with the same rules and the same management plans. There is no problem fishing next to a Native. We don’t want to raise controversy. We get on well with the people

of Gesgapegiag. Why not work under the same model? We can see to the transfer of additional permits, if necessary. Yes, but let’s get along and be part of the discussions. There are other sectors of activity besides fisheries; there is agriculture, forestry and mining. But we are isolated. We would like to discuss it with them (the Natives and the federal authorities). We want people to emancipate themselves together. We want fisheries to last for decades,” says O’Neil Cloutier.

Protected areas

The director of the RPPSG also intends to ask for explanations during the advisory committee on lobster, to be held during the second part of

March in Gaspé, about the goal of 30% of protected areas targeted by the federal government in Canadian waters by 2030. The Gaspé Peninsula, part of the American Bank located off the Percé-Gaspé axis, has been a marine protected area since 2014.

“We attended only one meeting on this subject. When the marine protected area was created, they (the authorities) told us that they would gradually reintroduce the least environmentally damaging fisheries. Nine years later, there is a large space, touching the greatest depths, and no catch has resumed,” he explains.

“We hear that the target could be increased to 20% or 25% for 2025. We are at 14% and a bit more in Canada. During this time, hundreds of pollutants descend into the St. Lawrence estuary as far as Rimouski and that affects the oxygenation of our waters. What is going on is that they want to have a protected area advisory committee to make suggestions to the protected area management committee. People want to expand the American Bank protected area. I’m not sure but I suspect so. You have to realize that the American Bank is one of the only places where we (coastal fishermen) can fish for Atlantic halibut and snow crab. This area comes very close to our fishing grounds,” says Mr. Cloutier.



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CRAB: Prices as low as \$2 per pound

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - As crab season begins, prices paid to fishermen could be as low as \$2 per pound at the start of the season.

This is the floor price mentioned by a longtime observer of the fishing industry when the bracket could be between \$2 and \$3.50 per pound.

Last year, the price paid at the start of the season was \$7.50, a price that stabilized near the \$6-mark for the rest of the season.

Neither crab processors nor crab fishermen are willing to further discuss the data, simply saying that it is only "rumours and speculation".

The date for Zone 12, which covers the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence, is not yet known, but the launch could be in early April if the New Brunswick fishing harbours are de-iced.

Another source close to the industry believes that fishermen who are in a good financial position could likely still make a profit from a catch by getting \$3 a pound, but those with more debt could have a little more difficulty.

An observer notes, however, that it could be quite easy for them to push back financial deadlines, given the current situation.

In addition, the catch quota could increase by 12% for Zone 12, which remains to be confirmed by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Joyce Murray.

All of these elements lead the vice president of E.Gagnon

et Fils, Bill Sheehan, the largest crab processor in the Gaspé, to say that the 2023 season will be unique.

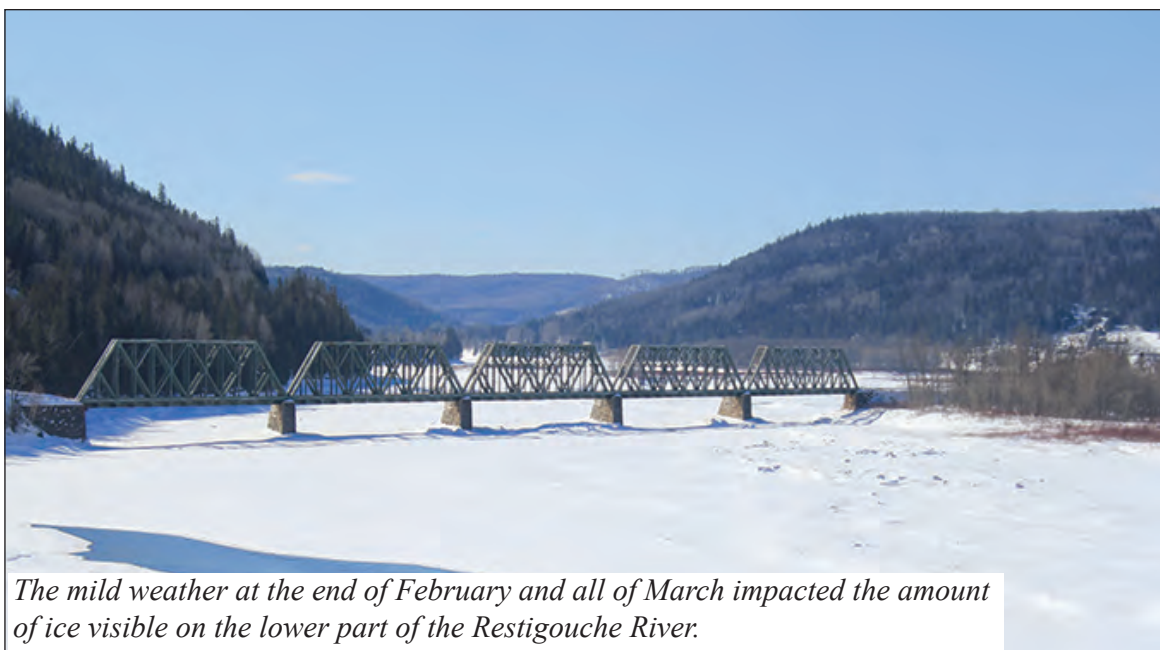
"We are leaving the Boston show in a very different position than last year: inflation, economy, war in Ukraine. No need to say more. We face other challenges. We have seen other (challenges). We will have no choice but to adjust," says Mr. Sheehan.

He mentions that last year, in Boston, buyers were not truthful about their inventories considering there are still inventories from 2022 and even 2021 in the warehouses.

"The local market should return with more affordable prices for the consumer. This is not good news for the industry. It remains to be seen regarding the United States and Japan. In Japan, Russia, with the embargo in the United States, turned to the Japanese market. They are currently selling decent volumes, not too expensive, in Japan," says Mr. Sheehan who still hopes that his view of the market is wrong.

"We expect to weather a good storm, but things can recover," he says, referring to the start of the pandemic when no one expected a good market with the suspension of cruises and restaurant closures. "With a little hindsight, without being a record year (2020), it was still a good year for the sector in general," states Mr. Sheehan.

If the projection of a 12% increase in quotas is confirmed for Zone 12, the total catches would reach 31,900 tonnes.



The mild weather at the end of February and all of March impacted the amount of ice visible on the lower part of the Restigouche River.

Photo: G. Gagné

Matapedia residents anxious for hovercraft arrival

GILLES GAGNÉ

MATAPEDIA – When March knocks at the door, the citizens of Matapedia wonder if they will witness the arrival of the Canadian Coast Guard hovercraft Sipu Muin before the Restigouche River causes damage to the village. Last year, the hovercraft arrived on April 8 and started working on the river the following day. It cleared the troublesome spots before the ice could cause flooding. Sipu Muin means "river bear" in Mi'gmaq.

"The hovercraft is currently continuing icebreaking in the Trois-Rivières sector, after that the crew will carry out a maintenance period in preparation for transit to the Restigouche sector. We are therefore planning a potential departure during the next week (the week that started on March 27). Although a

date has not been set yet, it will be decided according to the best weather window for the transit. When we know the departure date, we can better estimate the arrival of the hovercraft in the (Pointe-à-la-Croix and Matapedia) area," states Canadian Coast Guard spokesperson Émilie Proteau-Beaulieu.

In April, 1995, a year after the major flooding of mid-April 1994, the hovercraft which, at the time, was named Waban Aki started coming to the Matapedia.

The 1994 flood caused millions of dollars of damage to private and public properties. The idea to bring the hovercraft to the Matapedia area came from the former Member of the National Assembly for the riding of Bonaventure, Marcel Landry, who had seen the hovercraft work in the upper Saint Lawrence River area during

the years he spent in Longueuil at the Union des producteurs agricoles' head office.

The hovercraft arrived on time every year between 1995 and 2007 inclusively but floods have taken place a few times since, including 2008, 2014 and 2019. The hovercraft was occasionally delayed because it was needed to open the Port of Shippagan for New Brunswick crab fishermen, a situation heavily denounced by Matapedia residents, who felt neglected and not as important as the wealthy snow crab fishermen.

The Canadian Coast Guard as well as the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans now use tugboats to free the Shippagan harbour. The process has already started. In addition, there isn't much ice in the Bay of Chaleur this winter.

A marked increase in the cost of snow removal in Gaspé

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The cost of snow removal for the northern sector of Gaspé has increased by 30%, a direct consequence of inflation and the increase in the cost of fuel.

The Town of Gaspé resumed the tender process after not receiving any submissions in January. In the new round, the town received a few proposals and the council accepted that of Transport Jacques Plourde for the entire sector between Anse-à-Valleau and Cap-des-Rosiers.

"We expected it. This is a 30% increase in costs compared to the previous contract which was dated five years ago. We were expecting an indexation of costs with the increase in fuel costs and with

the comparables that we had everywhere in Quebec where all contracts increased by an average of 30%," explains the mayor, Daniel Côté.

The contract is for five years. The first year will be billed at \$475,000 and the agreement will be indexed thereafter according to the Consumer Price Index.

The town tried to find ways to save money

"Teams have divided the territory in different ways to try to lower the price and try to bring in new players. In the end, regardless of the calculation method chosen, the lowest final bidder, Transport Jacques Plourde, obtained the contract," says the mayor, adding that even the option of

doing the snow removal internally has been looked at by the town.

In February, Gaspé awarded the contract for the southern sector with an indexation of 20% for the next five years and subsequently indexed according to the consumer price index.

The sole bidder, Ivan and Garry McKoy Inc., requested \$520,000 for the first year starting in the fall of 2023.

"Five years ago, the previous contract saw more significant increases in the south sector than in the north sector. In the end, the increase is equivalent in both sectors over 10 years, if we look at it in perspective," explains the mayor.

Study on infrastructure

Gaspé has commissioned a study on the state of the aqueduct, sewer and wastewater treatment infrastructures.

"There are preliminary analyzes made by our in-house engineers to target a mandate to be given externally. We gave a mandate to assess the capacity of the pipes, the pumping stations, the drinking water wells, and the treatment plant to carry out an assessment so that we can target, in the short term, which sectors of the town we can afford to do development and how much it will cost to upgrade the infrastructure to continue on the path of development," explains the mayor. "This is an essential condition for further development," he adds.

Just to redo the pipes in the downtown, around rue Mgr

Ross, the bill was valued at \$16 million a decade ago.

"I don't know how much it would cost today - easily \$25 to 30 million with the rising costs. Here, we are only talking about redoing the existing one. It is clear that it costs a fortune," says the mayor, who also notes that the investment for development can be profitable.

"If we want to continue on this path, and the development in itself pays off, we will have to make decisions later but, in the meantime, we must document the situation," says the mayor.

The studies are expected no later than the beginning of the summer. "It will allow us to direct the next developments," concludes the mayor.

Town of Percé update: A footbridge will be added to the project to repair the Barachois railway bridge

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

PERCÉ – The Quebec Ministry of Transports (MTQ) is proposing to Percé to build a multifunctional footbridge as part of the repair of the Barachois railway bridge, on the condition that the town subsequently becomes its owner.

A few years ago the citizens' committee for the development of Barachois had the idea of making a five-kilometre multifunctional trail along the Malbaie barachois between Coin-du-Banc and Barachois. At the time they contacted the Ministry of Transport to see if it was a possibility.

“They (the development committee) won because the ministry is interested in collaborating. We had several meetings with the (Transports Québec) Rail Department and Vélo-Québec. The MTQ arrives with the repair of the bridge and in the same vein wants to design this footbridge,” says the mayor, Cathy Poirier.

“The resolution adopted this evening (March 14) stipulates that the town will negotiate the down payment to be made with the ministry, but they will make the plans



Photo: N.Sergerie

The Barachois railway bridge.

and specifications, design, and the construction and then transfer it back to the town. It is a very interesting project for tourism development,” says the mayor.

In addition, the council adopted a resolution reaffirming to be in favour of the rehabilitation of the rail to Gaspé.

Cathy Poirier referred to a previous statement by Minister Diane Lebouthillier last May which said “I will believe it when I see it” for the repair of the railway line be-

tween Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

“It's definitely hard to believe. When you hear ‘Yeah, you'll believe it when you see it...’ With evidence (building the walkway) like this, I think the intent is formal. The work is being done and the inspections are being done. If you ask me for my opinion: I believe in it and I believe in it strongly,” says the mayor.

A short question period

During the question pe-

riod, the council applied a regulation that has been in place for several years. That regulation limits the time for questions, as well as provides additional formalities.

The mayor, Cathy Poirier, says she appreciates the question period when she can give more information than during the council portion of the meeting.

“That said, for a few months, we are no longer there. We are in question periods that never end, that overflow, that can last with a single individual for 10 to 15 minutes where we bring ideas one as far-fetched as the other. We go far beyond the concept of a question period,” says the mayor.

The time was strict and during the council meeting on March 14, the application of the rules went smoothly.

The mayor wants to

counter what she calls the misinformation of certain citizens. “Absolutely. In the last month, I've seen people come here giving false information. It is not in the public interest. On the contrary, it blurs people's minds. We may not be super clear but to go from there is alluding to the effect that the council does not have all the information required to make decisions. At some point, we have to stop that because it is completely false,” says Ms. Poirier.

The mayor mentions that a court decision is expected soon regarding the tourist fee. “The question period is no longer the time to talk about that subject since it is in court. We will talk about it later,” adds the mayor.

The Mayor mentions that citizens can contact town employees at any time to have their questions answered.

Collective kitchens:

An essential tool to reduce food insecurity in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands

Press release

Gaspé, March 27, 2023 –March 26 was the 27th National Collective Kitchens Day and events were held throughout Quebec under the theme “Bringing People Together.” The Food Security Roundtable of the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands (TCSAGÎM) emphasizes the essential contribution of collective kitchens in reducing food insecurity in our region, in addition to breaking isolation for many people. During the current inflation crisis, in order to accomplish their missions, organizations offering collective kitchen activities have demonstrated creativity, resourcefulness and resilience.

There are nearly 150 collective kitchen groups in the region, with an average of six to eight people per group. These people come together in about thirty locations throughout the territory. This year, more than 100,000 servings were cooked by these groups. Collective kitchens are frequented by people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds: workers; retirees; young parents; and people benefiting from social assistance or unemployment insurance. Following two consecutive years marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and sanitary measures, which slowed down or completely stopped collective kitchen activities, the groups are very happy to be back in the various locations throughout the territory. The downside to this is the lack of recurrent funding, as well as the growing need for support of groups which include people who are experiencing complex issues, particularly regarding mental health.

Since 1997, the National Day of Collective Kitchens has celebrated the importance of collective cooking groups as a solution and an alternative to isolation and loneliness. It is also an opportunity to give an annual reminder to the public, the press and the government of the need to guarantee the universal right to food. The TCSAGÎM has made a toolbox available to organizations and citizens, which is aimed at facilitators and participants of collective kitchens and which is continuously updated: <https://tcsagim.org/boite-a-outils/> About the TCSAGÎM

The TCSAGÎM aims to promote exchange and support autonomous community organizations working in the area of food security. Being part of the group allows members to define their common orientations concerning the services and activities offered while ensuring greater visibility and the development of new socio-economic expertise as an agent of social change.

EASTERN ALLIANCE:

Cont'd from cover

assures Mr. Deschênes.

The alliance will need technical resources to carry out the projects obtained on Wednesday and those which could be submitted.

“It's in the possibilities of hiring. We will be able to deliver the wind farms and study the possibilities to respond to this call for tenders,” says the Gaspé Peninsula president.

Three criteria are required by Quebec to participate in the call for tenders: participation of the local community at approximately 50%; maximizing the Quebec content of the project to approximately 60% of overall expenditures and developing and maintaining harmonious relations with Aboriginal communities.

“We qualify under the three key conditions to be able to bid. The Eastern Energy Alliance has a head start in this regard. Rest assured that we will be part of it,”

says Mr. Deschênes bluntly.

With LM Wind Power in Gaspé manufacturing blades and towers being constructed at Fabrication Delta in New Richmond, the region could benefit from this new call for tenders.

“The companies that we have known in the territory for several years have had to export and explore other international markets, particularly in the United States. Finally, we have predictability over time. This is something we've been asking for for a few years. The sector wants to obtain predictability. Industry players just got it. It makes room for them to invest in Quebec,” concludes Mr. Deschênes.

The projects selected by Quebec last Wednesday will average 6.1 cents per kilowatt hour in 2022 dollars.

The Eastern Energy Alliance was created on February 16 and brings together 16 MRCs from Montmagny to the Magdalen Islands and the Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk

First Nation (Malécites de Viger) from the Lower Saint Lawrence. This partnership brings together more than 209 communities and territories.

Its ancestor, the Alliance éolienne de l'Est, brought together the Lower Saint Lawrence and the Gaspé Peninsula-Magdalen Islands Energy Boards, which brought together the MRCs of these two regions.

With the March 15 announcements, once the three awarded projects are built, the alliance will own wind farms amounting to 1,100 megawatts of power.



Honouring the women of Gesgapegiag Women's Day Celebration 2023

DIANE SKINNER
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GESGAPEGIAG: Gesgapegiag Health and Community Services (GHCS) hosted a Women's Day event in Gesgapegiag on Friday, March 17.

As part of the event GHCS offered two workshops, along with other activities that promote health and wellness. Approximately 30 women attended the event.

Brooke McWhirter, the Psychosocial Intervenor with GHCS tells Spec, "The highlight was our medicine bag making workshop. Unfortunately, we had limited supplies but everyone was interested in making one. Our facilitator, Theresa Caplin (Gally), had a blast animating, and there were many laughs and teach-



At the Gesgapegiag Women's Day event, those attending were taught to make traditional medicine bags by Theresa Caplin.



The material used for making the medicine bags is displayed here.

Photos: Brooke McWhirter

ings throughout the sessions." Brooke's role at GHCS includes assisting with event

planning, such as the Women's Day event, individual follow-ups and prevention workshops in local schools.

The day also included a video honouring women, yoga and meditation, Zumba, fly tying and supper. Theresa Caplin who taught the women to make medicine bags tells SPEC, "I taught the group how to make a leather medicine bag. We used leather, sinew and a glover needle. It is difficult to sew leather. It is so fulfilling to pass on the teachings to the people of Gesgapegiag. All were pleasantly surprised by how their work turned out. We painted the medicine bags and filled them with our four

sacred medicines; sweetgrass, cedar, sage and tobacco. It was a great afternoon filled with sharing our Mi'gmaq language, our traditions, and culture and being surrounded by great women. Wela'liog! Gally!"

After the celebration, closing remarks were delivered and a draw for prizes was held. The day's activities were all funded by GHCS's program budgets.

Brooke McWhirter explains, "There are so many messages we want to send to our community of women, however, this year we hope to raise awareness about the importance of mental and physi-

cal wellness. We want women to know that it is important to prioritize their well-being and take care of their health. We also want to promote the social aspect as well. There is a strong community of women in Gesgapegiag, and we hope to bring everyone together to remind one another that we don't have to walk this journey alone."

One attendee, Charlene Condo, reflected, "Everything was awesome, I really enjoyed today's activities. It was relaxing just to sit there and laugh and dance! It was nice to simply spend time with other ladies and the food was delicious."



CASA hosts Women's Day event

Shannon Day,
Community Correspondent, CASA Communications Coordinator
NEW CARLISLE: - CASA hosted a very successful Women's Day event on Saturday, March 4 at the Cultural Centre in Paspebiac with 106 women attending.

The keynote speaker was Nadia Minassian along with presentations from Sarah Nellis, Madelyn Hayes, Cathy Grenier, Roberta Billingsley and Brenda Buttle.





Join us on the journey

Turas is Gaelic for journey or pilgrimage

Ann Kelly, Mary Robertson, and Cynthia Dow are your guides for a journey into self-discovery and enhanced well-being.

We want to share with you proven tools and techniques to help women in our community better cope with emotional and mental challenges.

Come explore story-telling, embodiment, and mindfulness.

Join us

- **New Carlisle Town Hall, April 4,** from 7 to 9 pm
 - Doors open at 6:30
- **New Richmond United Church Hall, April 11** from 7 to 9 pm
 - Doors open at 6:30
- **Escuminac Town Hall, April 15** from 1 to 3 pm
 - Doors open at 12:30
- **Douglstown Community Center, April 22** from 1 to 3 pm
 - Doors open at 12:30

For more information, contact us at turas.gaspesie@gmail.com or check us out on Facebook @ "Turas: Join us on the Journey"

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Announcements



In Memory

FLOWERS: Alma

In loving memory of a precious grandmother who passed away on March 2, 1983.

*It's been 40 long years since you passed away,
How much we miss you, words cannot say.
You spent your life loving and caring,
And never thought twice about giving and sharing.
You made the world a better place,
With your gentle soul, kindness and grace.
We think of you and miss you everyday,
And forever in our hearts, you will always stay.
Loved, remembered, longed for always
With the passing of each year.*

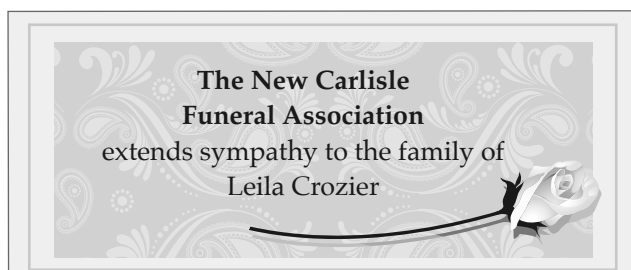
Lovingly remembered and cherished forever by Carol and Richard Smollett.

SMOLLETT: Robert

In loving memory of a dear brother who passed away on March 2, 2014.

*A page in our book of memories,
Is gently turned today.
We remember you in silence,
And make no outward show.
And what it meant to lose you
No one will ever know.
Unseen, unheard but always near,
Still loved, still missed, still very dear.*

Lovingly remembered by brother Richard and sister-in-law Carol.



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COAST ROUND-UP: \$5 per week
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COAST ROUND-UP

GASPÉ:

Royal Canadian Legion

Please be advised that Legion memberships are available for \$50. Returning and new members welcome.

GASPÉ:

Cancer Foundation

New memberships and renewals are being accepted. \$15 per person or \$25 per couple. All new membership and renewals can be sent to Gaspé Cancer Foundation, P.O. Box 6078, Gaspé, Quebec G4X 2M6. Payment can also be made by e-transfer to gaspe45@hotmail.com. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. For more information, please contact Tony Patterson at 418-368-3276; Beatrice Coffin at 418-368-1566 or Patricia Ste. Croix at 418-649-3779.

April 23: The Gaspé Can-

cer Foundation AGM will be held at the Gaspé Legion beginning at 1:30 p.m. . A light lunch will be served.

BARACHOIS:

BADC

March 31: The Historic Photo exhibit Once upon a time, Barachois... in pictures on the second floor of Robin's store in Barachois, will close on March 31. The BADC will host a free bilingual presentation by historian Jean-Marie Thibeault, from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. 30 places are available. Please reserve by email to janet.c.harvey@gmail.com or call Francoise at 418-360-7632.

PORT DANIEL:

Three Star Golden Age Club

Tuesdays: Pétanque from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Tuesday evening to have fun and learn a new game. Cost is \$3.

April 28: Gift bingo beginning at 7 p.m. \$10 a strip and \$20 a series.

May 13: Mother's Day tea from noon to 2 p.m. \$10 per person.

SHIGAWAKE:

Community Centre

April 10: Gift bingo - Details to follow.

HOPE:

Hope Baptist Church

Sundays: Sunday School starting at 10 a.m. Worship service beginning at 11 a.m.

NEW CARLISLE:

Royal Canadian Legion Branch #64

Please be advised that Le-

gion memberships are available for \$45. Returning and new members welcome.

Thursdays: Open from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Fridays: Darts beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Saturdays: Open at 2 p.m. Everyone welcome!

April 4: General meeting at 7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.

NEW CARLISLE:

Bible Chapel Meetings

Sundays: 9:30 a.m. Breaking of Bread for believers. 2 p.m. Gospel meeting and Sunday School.

Thursdays: 7 p.m. Prayer Meeting and Bible Study. Everyone welcome! For more information: 418-752-3372 or 418-752-6011.

UNITED CHURCH

HOPE TOWN
Sunday, April 2
10 a.m. Service

UNITED CHURCH

NEW RICHMOND
Sunday, April 2
10 a.m. Service

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Sunday, April 2
NEW CARLISLE
11 a.m. Holy Eucharist
SHIGAWAKE
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist
Thursday, April 6
NEW CARLISLE
7 p.m. Maundy Thursday
Friday, April 7
NEW CARLISLE
10 a.m.

Stations of the Cross
HOPE TOWN
3 p.m. Good Friday
SHIGAWAKE
1 p.m. Good Friday

PARISH OF GASPÉ

Sunday, April 2
9 a.m. St. Andrew's York Holy Eucharist - Palm Sunday
Friday, April 7
2 p.m. St. Andrew's York Holy Eucharist - Good Friday

ANNOUNCE ALL YOUR UPCOMING EVENTS!

Does your organization have a Coast Round-Up plan? If so, don't forget to send SPEC information about your upcoming activities.

Be sure to include:

- location
- date
- time
- cost



HELP KEEP YOUR COMMUNITY INFORMED

DEADLINE IS WEDNESDAYS AT 4 P.M. TO APPEAR IN FOLLOWING WEEK'S PAPER

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Chic-Chocs dog sled race a huge success

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – In the March 18 to 20 Chic Chocs dog sled race, Martin Massicotte took home the first place prize by covering the 200-mile distance in 34 hours, 35 minutes and 10 seconds, only three minutes and two seconds faster than former Chandler resident Katherine Langlais, who is also known as Kat. Tristan Laforce finished in third place completing his run in 36 hours, 12 minutes and 50 seconds.

The 200-mile event covered the distance between the Pin rouge tourist resort in New Richmond and Chandler, with stops at the Relais la Cache, Murdochville and Bailey Bridge, in the backcountry of Chandler.

40-mile event

Stéphane Roy came in first place in the 40-mile event, which began at the Pin rouge tourist site and finished at Relais la Cache in Cascapedia-St-Jules. His time was 3 hours, 34 minutes and 12 seconds. Diane Marquis, 69, who is a legend



The winners of the 40-mile race, from left to right, Diane Marquis, second place, Stéphane Roy, first place, and Éric Boisvert, who finished third.

in the sport of dog sledding, placed second. She covered the distance in 4 hours, 19 minutes and 25 seconds, which was 45 minutes and 13 seconds behind the winner. Éric Boisvert finished in third place with a time of 4 hours, 28 minutes and 13 seconds, 8 minutes and 48 seconds behind Diane Marquis. The exact distance between

Pin rouge and Relais la Cache is 43 miles.

While seven teams participated in the first Chic-Chocs race last year, 21 teams entered this year's event, 14 in the 40-mile event and seven in the 200-mile race. Compulsory resting periods were imposed at La Cache, Murdochville and Bailey's Bridge in Chandler.



Photos: Courtesy of the Chic-Chocs race

The winners of the 200-mile race, from left to right, Chandler's Katherine Langlais, second place, Martin Massicotte, first place and Tristan Laforce, who finished third.

Maria's Philippe Dugas, who is the main organizer and also a dog sled racer, was quite satisfied by the turnout.

"Twenty-five teams were registered 10 days before the event and 21 showed up. I was expecting more cancellations because it is the end of the season but people still came," he said minutes before the start of

the event.

Good crowds showed up as well, notably at Pin rouge on March 18, even if the race kicked off relatively early, at 8:30 a.m.

The weather was mild for the duration of the race and wet snow was often covering the ground, except at the top of certain mountains.

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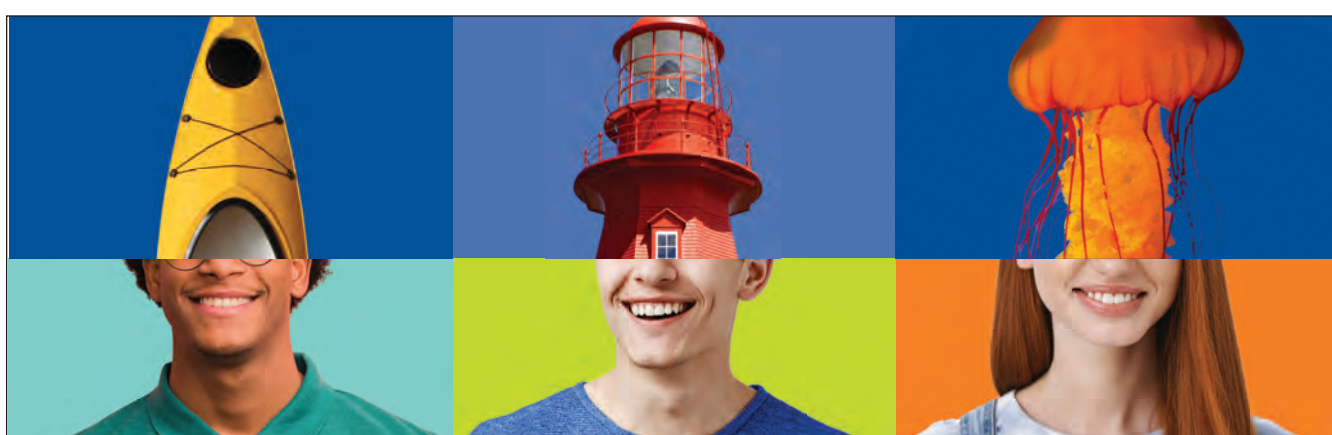
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