

RALPH SURETTE

✉ rsurette@herald.ca
🐦 @chronicleherald

Ralph Surette is a freelance journalist in Yarmouth County.

Fishery trapped between rudderless feds, reckless band



Sailing the rough waters of the native lobster question — one of the big todos for 2021 — is not going to be easy with the mast held aloft by two loose bolts: a muddled federal government and an erratic Sipekne'katik band using "moderate living" as cover to ransack lobster stocks at will, conservation be damned.

At any rate, as expected, this latter part didn't work out too well — at least not economically. Chief Mike Sack said a couple of weeks ago that all his Sipekne'katik fishers had lost money in the fall's controversial fishing on St. Marys Bay.

Nobody says anything in the open, but it must be a concern for the First Nations leadership generally that the mercurial Sack is becoming the public face of Mi'kmaw affairs, arguably to the detriment of Mi'kmaw advancement.

When the bands announced their half share in the purchase of Clearwater Fine Foods for \$500 million this fall, the first thing I heard here in southwest fishing country was a snarling comment that this must be Sack up to more mischief.

The purchase was, in fact, a business coup, following other, smaller investments. The B.C.-based First Nations financial group that supplied the cash is raising money from investors in the financial markets.

Simply, fishing is profitable. With a basketful of federally-granted licences (the Sipekne'katik, for example, have 33 in various fisheries) and now private investment at hand, this is a major open door for First Nations.

It will be easier to take that door if the commercial industry is not hostile. In Western Nova Scotia, the lobster industry is officially receptive to increased Mi'kmaw participation within fisheries department rules. However, after Sipekne'katik's trash-fishing of St. Marys Bay and Sack earlier threatening to disrupt the opening of the big Lobster District 34, which would likely have meant Mohawk warriors and the like here provoking violence on the wharves — Sack said he called it off because of COVID — that sentiment might have hardened.

What we have here is the Maritime version of the national drama (which is playing out in the U.S., Australia and other places as well), in which the story of the dehumanization of native populations over the centuries, capped recently by accounts of residential



Sipekne'katik First Nation Chief Mike Sack and company have taken the concept of moderate living to mean, with regard to lobster, "that they can do whatever they like whenever they like, and that if anyone pushes back they'll demand, as they absurdly did last fall, that the Canadian army show up to protect them," writes Ralph Surette.

TINA COMEAU

schools and disappeared Aboriginal women, is finally told and modern populations are horrified — minus, of course, a pool of white supremacists and their ilk.

Setting things right — what we're calling "reconciliation" in Canada — however, is a fraught affair. It will never be fast enough for brutalized populations and occasional radical action will erupt — such as the pointless blockades of last winter — cooling the sympathies of the general population.

In the Maritimes, the point of contention is "moderate living" — the undefined concept launched by the Supreme Court 21 years ago. It's a powerful standard for the Mi'kmaw people to hold aloft, but in legal specifics, it's gobbledygook. It's the Supreme Court saying: "We can't fix this legally, so over to you in the political/societal sphere to work it out." In other words, on the ground — or on the water — it depends on how it's bargained out in the larger sphere.

Sack and company have taken it to mean, with regard to lobster, that they can do whatever they like whenever they like, and that if anyone pushes back they'll demand, as they absurdly did last fall, that the Canadian army show up to protect them.

Granted that they've accomplished one positive result: bringing needed attention to the matter after the federal government dawdled for 21 years. However, again on the negative side, they've also thrown a monkey wrench into the notion that being Mi'kmaq automatically makes you the heir to a 10,000 year tradition of living with nature. The RCMP have been hauling up Sipekne'katik traps without the regulatory protections — escape hatches for the little ones, biodegradable panels for the big ones, traps untended with dead lobsters in them, plus lobsters dumped dead in the woods because they don't last when caught during warm-weather moulting season.

Alas, we have an irony here. With regard to lobster, at least, the predatory white man has developed a working conservation regimen and at least one Mi'kmaw band would be happy to wreck it.

In flushing out the federal government, Sack has also forced it closer to its logical fallback position, assuming that negotiations go nowhere, which seems to be the case: declare all Mi'kmaw lobster fishing valid only during the commercial seasons, and work out the details from there in the context of a broader Mi'kmaw presence in the fishery, and in society generally.

That is, assuming Ottawa is present at all. Granted, reconciliation is a big, complicated matter nationwide. But one of my suspicions is that with Ottawa's drift on this, as with much else, the inertia derives from the notion that this is, after all, just the Maritimes and it doesn't much matter in the larger scheme of things.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

SCANNING WON'T SUFFICE

I was astounded to read that the Nova Scotia Health Authority was prepared to take the wealth of data in patient charts and simply scan them (Jan. 7 story).

Prior to 1995, patient charts in the Halifax Infirmary were abstracted by health records personnel to collect data on more than 250 key clinical findings relating to demographics, history, physical examination, co-existing illnesses, laboratory results and radiographic findings.

This produced a MedisGroups Comparative Hospital Database that could be used by clinicians, researchers, health administrators and population health to better understand our patient population and improve services. The paper-based chart is widely recognized to be unfit for the purpose of exchanging information, so simply scanning it achieves nothing.

Grace Paterson, health informatician, Halifax

PRISONERS NEED PROTECTION

Re: "Prisoners not a priority" (Jan. 8 letter), in which Ron Young decries the vaccination of prisoners before long-term care providers, etc.

He argues that "prisoners are in a confined area where it should be very easy to control the spread" of COVID-19. However, the public health experts quoted in your item on the next page deem such "confined spaces" to be "high-risk settings."

Mr. Young confuses social utility with basic human rights. Admittedly, a front-line doctor is contributing more to the effort against the pandemic, but putting vulnerable inmates at the end of the vaccination queue is just morally wrong. Their punishment in incarceration, not withholding essential medical services.

Tom Ross, Middleton

INMATES BEFORE VETERANS?

I take exception to news that federal inmates will be getting vaccinated this week (Jan. 8 story). I wore a uniform for this country for 27-plus years. I am 71 years young and I have no idea when and if I will be able to be vaccinated.

Yes, inmates may be vulnerable, but it's a consequence of their own actions. Someone needs to rethink this plan.

Donald Fletcher, New Salem

ARMED SEDITION

Re: "Real riots ignored" (Jan. 8 letter). Lucille Maranda insinuates that the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building on Wednesday was not a "real riot" compared to the violence that grew out of some protests in American cities over the past year.

Those riots were far outnumbered by peaceful protests, many of which were met with a massive law enforcement presence — such as the event in which peaceful protesters in front of the White House were dispersed

by police firing rubber buckets and chemical agents so Donald Trump could stage a ridiculous photo op in front of a church (which he never attends), demonstrating the proper way to hold a Bible.

It was not "Antifa and Black Lives Matter mobs" that stormed the Michigan legislature with firearms on April 30 or hatched a plot to kidnap and possibly murder the governor of that state. Nor was it they who invaded the U.S. Capitol, endangering members of the U.S. Congress and their staff who were doing the nation's sacred business of certifying the election of Joe Biden as president.

Burning down businesses and looting are reprehensible, but that is a far cry from violent attempts to disrupt the machinery of government. Call that what it is: not a riot, but armed sedition.

Ben Robertson, Windsor

LOCK HIM UP!

Forget the 25th amendment and impeachment — just do as The Donald advocates for his foes: "Lock him up!" Take him away in a straitjacket or handcuffs. It doesn't matter — just take the madman away!

Darrell Tingley, Timberlea

DESTRUCTIVE DEER

It was encouraging to read the article in your Jan. 6 edition that lends voice to the problem of deer overpopulation. I live in Bible Hill, just outside of

Truro. My neighbourhood is overrun with deer — at times as many as 23 in a herd.

We had multiple gardens, both vegetable and decorative, which provided immense pleasure over many years. The deer demolished 90 per cent of everything.

We've put year-round eight-foot-high fences around the surviving rhododendrons. I can no longer even fill my front-door decorative planters, as the deer come up on the veranda and tear them apart — often before they realize much of what is planted is artificial.

Deer are beautiful creatures, bold, unafraid, but as much as I'd like not to harm them, they are destructive and a health risk with regard to ticks. Something needs to be done.

Penny Baker, Bible Hill

GRATEFUL FOR GOOD GRUB

To the hunters and fishermen who recently donated fish and venison to the food bank at Christ Church in Dartmouth, I wish to express how much the meat and trout was appreciated.

I shared the incredibly delicious fish with a poor old man who had just spent two months in hospital, and the venison became a savory spaghetti sauce for myself and friends.

For those of us who enjoy the taste of wild meat, it is a rare and special treat. I believe it has been at least 20 years since I have had any at all, and I am so very grateful.

S.J. Foster, Dartmouth