

What We Heard

Getting to Know Commercial Fisheries

“We’ve spent forty years trying to advance access: the fight is continuous.”

- Participants are interested in how the new northern program will help them build and maintain economically viable commercial fisheries.
 - Indigenous participation in commercial fisheries has a complex history in the region, and communities want to know how the program may be used to reposition their participation in the future.
- Participants have offshore quota and inshore licences. One has a mid-shore enterprise, while the other has a number of independent enterprises. *“Commercial fisheries are primarily keeping our communities going.”* Both have access to multiple processing plants in Labrador and elsewhere in Atlantic Canada.
 - Participants have benefitted from the Allocation Transfer Program; using it to acquire communal quota and to gain access to other quota. *“We still need the allocation transfer program and we want to be able to access it.”* One has a 100-foot, fixed-gear factory freezer vessel that is 100% Indigenous owned and allocation transfer program funding has been integral to maintaining this vessel.
 - Access is a priority issue for participants; especially, to adjacent fish stocks and emerging fisheries, but also to existing fisheries. *“There’s only two ways to get access: you give it us or we buy it.”* One would like access to fisheries to be more balanced among Indigenous groups in Labrador.
- Participants’ communities are involved in a number of economic development partnerships to develop jobs for community members. One has established partnerships to extend fishing activities and benefit from the experience of others. *“We’re finding ways to keep our crew busy all summer.”* This includes partnering with other Indigenous groups to *“make good use of assets to support one another.”*
 - Both see the need for community recruitment in fisheries and succession planning. One is striving to get members on board their vessel and to help them build capacity to participate individually in inshore fisheries. *“Hopefully, the program can help us with that.”* The other has ongoing discussions about how to attract younger members to the industry. *“It’s challenging to get them to want to be involved in the fishery. The work is too hard, and working in plants is not appealing.”*

Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiatives in the Atlantic and Pacific

“Business structures, while invisible, are really essential for the business.”

- Participants do not have a lot of awareness about the integrated commercial fisheries initiatives in the Atlantic or the Pacific. The elements of these capacity-building

programs and the benefits to communities were discussed during the session. Participants then raised some points about the program being brought to Labrador.

- One thinks the structure of the program must be able to deal with Indigenous communities that have long been involved in commercial fisheries: *“We’re not new, and most of our companies are in a position to grow. We need to find a way to deal with access because I want to know what we’re building capacity for?”*
- Another would like scientific capacity-building to be linked to the program and integrated into business operations to be able to better plan for the future. *“We don’t have that kind of capacity yet. And, if we’re going to be successful, we’re going to need it.”*

Developing the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative

Business Planning

- Participants identified some of their business planning and capacity needs. For example:
 - One would like to engage community members in business modelling so they have the support of members over the long term. *“The business plan has to work for everyone and the harvesters who keep our communities going must be engaged in planning.”*
 - The other is presently doing long-term strategic planning to build capacity within and to find opportunities to expand outward. *“This is good timing. We need capacity and stability in what we have to offer within the organization.”*
- Participants support the integration of science and science advice into business planning. They also want to build internal capacity and expertise in order to stabilize current operations so they are ready to take advantage of future opportunities.

Ideal Business Development Team

- When considering the ideal business development team, one participant thinks it should include Indigenous people and have business expertise, financial expertise, and training and human resource expertise. The other thinks it should have a good science person and a ‘fish expert’ who is both knowledgeable about (and connected to) the industry. *“We need someone on our side.”*

Business Management Training & Skills Development

“Bringing all Nations together in Labrador to do the training together would save money.”

- Participants see the need for more business management training as not much has been offered in the region. In particular, they support training in fisheries operational management, financial management, strategic business planning and informed decision-making (among other areas). *“I’d like to have a better understanding on the financial side of things, business analytics and balancing sheets, for example.”* One would also like more industry-specific training.

- Participants both support local training that includes all Indigenous groups in Labrador.

Harvester Training

“We need to draw from a pool of mentors. Our fish harvesters are really knowledgeable.”

- Participants see career opportunities in the fishery for community members. *“They could be captains, mates, in quality management control, or other jobs.”*
- Fish harvesters in the region have already received boat operator, marine emergency duties (MED), and occupational health and safety training.
- Participants support more fish harvester training so they are able to use diverse fishing gear, to maintain their vessels, to understand fishing regulations, to be adept fisheries managers, and to be able to mentor others into the industry. There is also support for more training related to fish handling and processing (quality control and food safety). *“The more we know how and what the market is demanding, the better.”*

Conclusions and Next Steps

“From a fishery development process, we need to explore where partnerships and synergies may be beneficial.”

- Participants are interested in getting support through the program to advance their immediate needs while planning for the future. *“Anything we can do to extend the fishing season, we are interested.”* They also want to be included in fishery management decision-making tables so they can position their businesses for the future. *“Relationships are critical to advance. But we need to be in the room to be part of it.”*