

What We Heard

“There are opportunities in the North – and we have businesses to build upon.”

Getting to Know Commercial Fisheries

- Most participants in this session have long been involved in the commercial fishery. Some have advanced businesses, including established local and export markets.

Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiatives in the Atlantic and Pacific

- Participants learned about the benefits of the integrated commercial fisheries initiatives to communities in the Atlantic and Pacific.
 - They were especially interested in learning about the fisheries management system and would like access to this system to advance catch data management in their fishery enterprises. *“We need this software. Formulas get too complicated for Excel and it’s not doing what I need.”*

Developing the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative

Business Planning

“Planning over the long term for training and succession will ensure business stability.”

- Participants are focused on developing long-term strategic business and training plans to support fishery managers and harvesters in gaining specific skills. This includes planning for mentoring and succession of the next generation of fishery managers. *“We talk a lot about developing our fish harvesters, but not enough about managers. That’s important; it’s about business stability.”*
- Several participants emphasized the importance of planning for community benefits through the business by involving the entire community in enterprise plan during community meetings and incorporating commercial fisheries aspirations in community development plans. *“We want to use the capacity we already have and help those who don’t yet have capacity. We can do this by having more community meetings and talking about the potential in commercial fisheries.”* The Institute noted that this is a best practice for some communities in the Atlantic commercial fisheries program.
 - Others want to advance their training plans and use the expertise of the business development team to expand the skills of managers and harvesters in new technologies and aquaculture. *“We want to develop and improve the way we catch fish and secure product. Right now, we’re exploiting all we have.”*
 - A few support developing a clear organizational structure for their business to ensure stability for future diversification and vertical integration activities. One would

like more advice on Aboriginal rights in commercial fisheries and an adapted code of conduct for coastal fish harvesters.

Ideal Business Development Team

“We should be part of the business development team selection committee.”

- Most participants support a wide range of expertise to be within the business development team: fisheries, aquaculture, business, financial, training and human resources. Some prioritize fisheries and business expertise overall, and most envision that an Indigenous and/or community member would be on the team.
 - One thinks a local industry contact would also be valuable, while others support a team that regularly meets with communities as well as the Department.

Enterprise Scale, Strategic Planning, and Business Development Team Support

“The depletion of fish stocks is our main fear.”

- Participants stress the importance of partnerships when planning for short- and long-term priorities and aspirations. *“We need partnerships with guaranteed revenues and existing licences.”* For some, this means balancing the enterprise’s strengths and weaknesses when considering partnerships.
 - A few would like to vertically integrate their business into multi-species processing, sales and maintenance of vessel and fishing equipment, as well as the restaurant business. Another wants to move to offshore fishing in the future.
- Three communities started working together in 2006 to vertically integrate their commercial fishing businesses into processing and distribution. This partnership resulted in the employment of 180 people. Another venture employs an additional 40 people. *“People did not believe us when we started planning for offshore fishing.”* These communities plan to expand even more in the future by mechanizing the means of production and making distribution more efficient.
 - These communities view their current fishing enterprise as mid-scale commercial with a long-term goal of becoming large-scale commercial.
- One participant pointed out that ‘large-scale’ enterprises in Indigenous communities could mean 50 employees because it relates more to the size of the community.
- Participants want the business development team to help them realize their future enterprise aspirations. This includes both financial and technical support. *“A good budget would provide real leverage for these aspirations. We can create an economy with a good budget.”* One stressed the importance of also planning for future inflation and the rising cost of oil and gas.

Business Management Training and Skills Development

- A few participants have taken some business management training in the past, including courses provided through their aquatic resource and oceans management

group. Some management courses taken in the past included human resource, finance and business management training.

- Most participants still see the need to be trained in fisheries operational management, financial management, strategic business planning, project management, human resource management, and informed decision-making.
- One would also like to see a fishery management university certificate that incorporated fisheries biology and aquatic lifecycles, fisheries management planning (total allowable catch and biomass), and statistics.
- Most participants support local training in partnership with educational centers, including one in Sept-Isle. A few also see value in exchanges with other Indigenous communities involved in commercial fisheries.

Harvester Training

- While fish harvesters in communities have had basic training and captaincy training in the past, most participants still want fish harvesters to be trained to fish safely. Participants also want more emphasis to be placed on advanced training so harvesters know how to use new gear and other technologies, can be certified divers, and have better fish handling skills. *“We want to make crews more versatile than they are now.”*
- The majority would also like more training in the community for mechanics to be able to repair vessels and gear, as well as standardized accreditation and/or certification courses for fish harvesters.
- A few want training to be offered in GPS, chart reading, advanced vessel operations, and fishery regulations.
- Participants support local training in partnership with existing educational centers, including the *École pêche Grand-Rivière*. They would also like to see training adapted to the culture and local languages (in practical terms). *“We need a system that recognizes experience and knowledge. The level of formal education may be low in communities, but there is still fisheries expertise.”*
- One wants the Department to encourage ongoing training through this program. *“We’ve been negotiating with DFO for more than 20 years to get more training to meet community needs.”* Another would like to see mentoring and coaching incorporated into training to try to build personal initiative in the community to want to succeed in this career choice. *“We need leadership in the communities because lack of initiative is a problem.”*
- A few participants raised the importance of having more community networking opportunities so fishing enterprises can share information and experiences about their businesses and their training needs.

Industry Know-how and Marketing

“The opportunities are infinite. It all comes down to our will and expertise, access to more information, and the budget.”

- Participants see opportunities such as second- and third-level processing, vessel maintenance and equipment retail, product diversification, and aquaculture. *“We’re interested in the jobs that these would create.”* Several view Quebec’s water quality and cool temperatures as ideal for aquaculture ventures.
- Participants have a lot of knowledge about the value of their fish products. They understand the importance of developing and maintaining local markets to reduce the costs of handling and transportation. They also understand the importance of quality control from everyone who handles live product – from the harvester to the retailer. *“The whole chain is accountable for the value and price of the fish.”*
 - Several participants have already developed value-added products to increase the value of their product. Many groups are also working to reduce their distribution costs by being the point of sale and delivery point. *“We want to create an economy that will have enough autonomy to grow on its own.”*
- To be ready for new opportunities, participants want more access to quota and licences, including in new fisheries. *“With access to only one product, supermarkets won’t talk to you.”* Others see a need for transfer of expertise in all fishery-related field, as well as funding to be able to take advantage of opportunities.
 - One community is looking at increasing the duration of work time to avoid the cost of seasonal staff rotations and retention issues. Another has a lot of licences that they cannot presently use because they do not have enough fishing vessels. With more vessels, they hope to create more jobs in their community.

Infrastructure Needs

- Participants identified the following infrastructure needs to advance their fishing enterprises: more vessels, modernized processing plants, new gear, drivers and other transportation and distribution services (including flat-bed trucks), storage space for live fish (freezers) and vessels undergoing repair, retail space, videoconferencing services, and infrastructure for aquaculture.
 - One community also saw a need for better road systems to be developed.
- Participants saw a lot of benefits resulting from meeting their infrastructure needs; especially, bringing more jobs to the community and other socio-economic benefits.

Conclusions and Next Steps

“We hope to have more tools, help and resources to help us develop our communities and our fisheries through this program.”

- Participants had questions about the amount of funding that the new program would have and the exact regions and areas that would be eligible for funding. They were concerned that \$7 million may not be enough to serve all of the eligible communities.

They recommended that the Institute's report include a map identifying eligible areas and that the Department be open about how different groups would be assessed for funding. *"If we're talking about sharing funding but it is going to be based on a per-capita basis, smaller communities will be at a disadvantage."*

- Participants were pleased with the interactive session and the worksheet exercises – and learning that funding through the new commercial program would be separate from Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program funding.

"We had some doubts, but this was above our expectations."

"I really liked it because we were open and put projects on the table."

"I really liked hearing about what's going on in other communities – and to see the bigger picture. Everyone contributed to help develop this program."

"Ultimately, I was pleasantly surprised by the session and reassured by the presence of other communities in this."

- Participants would like to meet again to be briefed on the next steps of this program.