

What We Heard

“It’s all dependent on the Alaskans – they’re at the headwaters so unless we control their commercial fishing, we won’t see anything here. If they cut commercial fishing in half or stopped for a few years, things could change.”

Getting to Know Commercial Fisheries

“Unless the program is for subsistence fisheries, I don’t see the appetite for this kind of industry.”

- Participants shared the commercial fishing experiences of their communities:
 - One presently holds a few commercial licences in a terminal river fishery which provides value-added fish to a local restaurant. They also have one members with a commercial licence under the Pacific Salmon Treaty Agreement to fish chinook, coho and sockeye.
 - Another used to operate a commercial fishery for chinook in the past, including a cannery, but the community only has one active commercial chum licence at present.
 - A few have commercial fishing licences for lake trout, but these are largely unused today and are under the management jurisdiction of Yukon Territory. *“We talk about retiring those licences because no one is using them.”*
- The majority of participants are not interested in pursuing a commercial fishery as their priority is to ensure sufficient food fish for their members. *“With salmon numbers so low, I don’t think commercial is in our future.”*
 - Participants from self-governing Nations also advise that future discussions related to potential fisheries economic development opportunities should be held with decision-makers (Chief and Council) as well as development corporations. In addition, they recommend referring to the fisheries chapters of their treaties.
 - Those with some interest in participating in the new program stressed the importance of not repeating past mistakes in commercial fisheries initiatives, including enhancement initiatives which came out of the Pacific Salmon Treaty: *“It was handed to us as an economic opportunity and we’re paying for us”* and excess salmon to spawning requirement permits where commercial fisheries are not viable: *“We decline it every year.”*

Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiatives in the Atlantic and Pacific

- Participants learned more about the integrated commercial fisheries initiatives in the Atlantic and the Pacific as well as the arms-length-from-government business development team’s confidential business support services.

- A few had questions about Pacific inland terminal fisheries and their experience developing viable businesses.

Developing the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative

While the majority of participants do not see a commercial fishery in their communities in the (near) future, they still had feedback about their business capacity needs. This input is reflected below.

Business Planning

- Every participant identified training as one of their business planning and capacity needs. This could include training for managers, harvesters, and/or other community members. A few also identified infrastructure and market research as priority needs. *“There must be an adequate market for whatever fish is being sold.”*

Ideal Business Development Team

- When considering the ideal business development team, the majority of participants saw the need for fisheries and business expertise, as well as for an Indigenous and/or community member to be on the team.

Enterprise Scale, Strategic Planning, and Business Development Team Support

“If for some reason, chinook starting coming back in large numbers, maybe a very small-scale fishery could be implemented.”

- Participants largely see economic fisheries at the artisanal stage. One community could envision a mid-scale fishery perhaps in five or 10 years in the future if strategic planning could address unstable run sizes, the high cost of doing business in the region, and consistent product quality. Another likes the idea of stocking pothole lakes with fish.
 - Several think there is more value selling fish closer to home; especially, to local stores and restaurants.
- Some participants had specific recommendations for business development team support. One thought they should provide implementation models and examples, while another thought they should be able to facilitate First Nations agreements or sharing accords with Alaskan Nations.

Business Management and Harvester Training and Skills Development

- Participants said no business management training or fish harvester training has ever been offered in their communities, even though training is a priority need for any commercial development. If training were to be given to community members, they prefer the training to be locally delivered.

Infrastructure Needs

- The majority of participants identified processing plants or processing areas as the key infrastructure need for any commercial fishing enterprise. Several also see a need

for landing sites, a community freezer, drivers/transportation, and retail infrastructure. One thought proper legislation and policy on commercial fishing in a First Nation would first be required.

Conclusions and Next Steps

“Consider looking at other communities when you come to visit, rather than the big centers. Build the rapport at the community levels.”

- The Institute was invited to have further discussions about the program at the community level. Participants recommended that Chiefs and Councils, and other decision-makers, be included in these discussions and that engagement be open to community members so any interested persons would be able to ask questions about the new program.