

What We Heard

“We want to ensure priority access is realized and adhered to.”

Getting to Know Communities, their Fisheries and their Experience with the Program

“We’ve done the work for years – have we become something or someone now?”

- Participants report that capacity has been built over the years through the program. This includes jobs and expertise even though lack of funding has prevented growth and, in some cases, led to fewer staff than in 1992.
- Communities with capacity are ready and want to look after fish and other resources in their territories. *“We’re going to be the management regime in our area – that’s our future – and that’s what we want.”* One participant said the reason their community entered into an agreement was to be fully involved in fisheries management. *“Our people are capable, given the opportunity to take the training and to take this on.”*
 - Participants also want more community involvement in enforcement. *“We are natural stewards in our area – and it is time to review the guardian/stewardship concept.”* There is shared concern about the lack of enforcement presence on waterways; particularly, where recreational and sport-fishing takes place.
- Participants have different agreements. For some Nations, the agreement is an activity of their aquatic resource and oceans management group. One agreement is in place for an aggregate of 23 First Nations, while others are individually set up with communities.
- A few participants at the session do not have an agreement. Communities with an agreement are being asked to assist in these areas. *“It’s challenging though, our cousins down river are watching us do the work and they’re not funded, they have no capacity.”*
- Participants are successfully achieving orderly food, social and ceremonial fishing through monitoring programs. *“We have 60 monitors for about 1,100 licensed fish harvesters.”* Others use program funding for an administrator, biologist, and seasonal field technicians to complete their data collection and stock assessment programs.
- The program objectives for participation in fisheries management and capacity-building in fisheries management need to be better assessed. One group uses program funding for Tier 1 and Tier 2 in-season planning to help communities make in-season decisions.

Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

“We fish all the salmon fisheries, but we also conserve them.”

- First Nations in the Lower Fraser fish a number of fish species, including five salmon species, steelhead, trout, and ooligan. Community members are designated to fish and each community has core designated harvesters.
- Participants note the cultural significance of certain fisheries, such as for dry-raking. They also want to be able to fish in their traditional waters.

Food

“When the Department tries to manage a number of interests, it becomes an issue for food fisheries.”

- Participants are concerned about how few salmon are being caught by their designated harvesters. They talked about how often they used to eat fish, but how that’s changed. *“There’s not enough food fish and we need to finalize policies to ensure future fisheries.”*
- While most communities have active fish harvesters, only some have food distribution programs. These may extend to sharing fish with the Elders of another community.
- Participants link the technical activities in their agreements to food needs. *“We’re collecting salmon data because there’s not enough to meet our community’s needs.”* They also want to ensure access to the resource for commercial reasons.

Social and Ceremonial

- Participant note the importance of fish for social and ceremonial purposes, including *First Fish* ceremonies, potlaching, and funerals. A few said the amount of fish permitted for this purpose has dwindled. There is also a disconnect between the department and communities about the importance of social and ceremonial fishing. *“They have questions, but communication is not there.”*

Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

“We’re funded for stock assessments, but we’re doing so much more.”

- Technical components differ between community agreements: one has an extensive monitoring program, another a stock assessment program, while others have data collection, stock assessment, and monitoring programs.
- Data collection, stock assessments, and monitoring programs are the most common technical components of agreements. One participant also has a stream program and spawning channel project. A few also said they had a hatchery in the past.
- Counting fences, fish wheels and other equipment are used by communities to do their work. Members also do code-wired tagging and collect that information from harvesters. In addition, economic fisheries may have biology or scale sampling.
- Communities also do technical work that is not funded by the program. For example, some work in partnership with their aquatic resource and oceans management group to undertake technical activities. Others have partnerships (including with the Department, in some cases) to do hydroacoustics, tagging programs, and habitat obstruction removals.
- In terms of needs, participants would like their agreements to fund habitat research and restoration, stream walks, and more salmon enhancement programs. They also want the program to fund some projects presently being undertaken with other partners.

Data Collection

- One participant wants the Department’s expansion factor of data to be substantiated and for data to factor in Indigenous traditional knowledge. *“We submit one set of numbers and a whole new set comes back. There’s a lack of trust and transparency. We could do this*

ourselves with biologist support.” Another thinks data collection gets sacrificed for program reporting requirements.

Fish and Fish Habitat Protection and Restoration

“We’re at the stage where we have to look after the fish more. It may also be time to focus on the ecosystem.”

- Participants support the program being used to protect fish stocks through hatcheries and spawning channel initiatives. They also want the future program to focus on getting more baseline information of returning stocks and to work on habitat restoration
- One participant asked why the Allocation Transfer Program was not being used to lessen the impact of large commercial operations on fish stocks (rather than targeted smaller boat operators). Another questioned why the Department brings in new programs when they should be focusing funding on ensuring fish stocks are healthy.

Monitoring, Control and Enforcement

- The catch monitoring programs of participants ensure the Department gets catch data required even though monitors are not paid overtime and have to work long shifts. *“They require data every 24 hours if the economic opportunity fishery is going on. Sockeye is 24-hour monitoring.”*
- Participants also note the impediments of electronic monitors with limited cell coverage and excessive battery use. They also do not see the point as paper copies are still required.
- Participants are interested in more enforcement. *“We’re really interested in controlling the numbers that people keep. We’re very interested in a program to better monitor and control illegal catches and poaching.”* They also want more monitoring and enforcement of the recreational fishery.

Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

- Participants unanimously support the need for guardians and would like more funding put to designations. *“We need guardians and our own people doing this work. We really need this program.”*
- Several participants talked about the initial fisheries guardian program; primarily, as a program that started with training a number of people in each community and worked well, but that didn’t last. They also referred to guardians as Aboriginal fishery officers:
“Aboriginal fishery officers worked out well. They underwent intense training: all departmental training, including in firearms, but they were not allowed to use them. Then, the program seemed to go away and they had no place to work.”
“It seemed a lot easier to have Aboriginal fishery officers on the water rather than the Department’s officers. If there was a dispute, they would be there to settle the issue. It worked out well, but we didn’t have them for very long. Hopefully, they will return.”
- One participant also shared background on an initiative called ‘BCARM’ which tested having fishery guardians do science-based activities as ‘Aboriginal resource managers.’

Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements

- Several participants have an economic opportunity fishery as part of their agreement. Some also participate in an excess salmon spawning requirement fishery, when it is available. One community still has an operational economic opportunity fishery landing and monitoring site and buying station.

Understanding Relationships

“We did a canoe journey with the Department’s enforcement staff in the spawning grounds. That’s how to build relationships.”

- Participants share information with the department on their designated fish harvesters, catch and monitoring data, and the results of stock assessments and other technical work. They also report on economic opportunity and other fisheries.
- Communities interact with resource managers, science, Conservation and Protection, and program administrators. These relationships range from neutral to positive:
“The name changes but we always get the same email.”
“Because [she’s] First Nation, we’re able to talk to her.”
- Participants want improved communications from the department. For example, communications support is needed to help fishery managers and program administrators explain regulations, restrictions, and other fishery management measures to leadership and harvesters. Education and awareness is also needed to talk to communities about declining fish stocks. *“They don’t understand the technical information – we use verbal communication. How can you help us make communications better?”*
- Participants also want help to improve communications with each other. *“We need First Nations protocols because we’re impacting each other now. We’re trying to build relationships.”*
- Participants support relationship-building at decision-making tables. *“There are First Nations with diverse interests and their contribution to the management of the fishery should be used.”* They also want to be more involved in decisions regarding restrictions and integrated management. *“We need to be involved even more with limited access.”*

Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

“We know we can manage the fishery and contribute to orderly management. We can be responsible and deliver; yet, there’s uncertainty there. It doesn’t seem right.”

- Participants are concerned about the program’s inadequate funding, despite increasing demands for deliverables and reporting requirements. *“We do \$10 worth of work for \$1.”* They also find reporting requirements create a time-consuming process. *“We used to send in the data, and reporting just depended on the person. But every year now, they keep changing the forms. We should just have to provide a summary.”*
- Participants want multi-year agreements so there is certainty to programs and capacity-building for co-management decision-making. They also see benefits in linking the program to other activities, such as habitat protection and restoration, species at risk,

and other natural resource activities. *“Many areas are not being managed; maybe this is an opportunity to develop a process to close the gaps.”*

- Participants prioritize capacity retention; especially, field technicians and harvesting crew (generally, seasonal workers) and they want these workers to be paid more fairly. *“It’s not just the seasonal hours: it’s the lack of promotion and pay increase. An experienced monitor makes the same as a new monitor. There’s no incentive to come back. They have to love what they do to come back.”*
 - To resolve this issue, participants support expanding the role of technicians to do multiple activities, including wildlife and ranger activities, and to receive training to do water and terrestrial activities. *“Field workers can learn to do multiple things and you’ll keep them because they want to be outside. They can do habitat restoration and monitoring, beaver dam control, and so much more.”*
 - Participants also think this solution will reduce annual costs of training and make the program operate more efficiently. One participant recommended that a socio-economic study be undertaken to assess the costs of ongoing recruitment and retraining vs. the cost of creating full-time Indigenous resource work.
- Participants note that knowledge transfer is often lacking when people come into the fishery manager or program administration position. One said they learned ‘everything from scratch’ and thought the program should address this issue.
- Participants also support investing in the collection of Indigenous knowledge. *“There is also a wealth of knowledge to be collected in communities, but we lack the funds (and time) to do this work. We need time to work with Elders and cultural folks on this.”* In addition, participants want the program to protect culturally significant fisheries that are integral to communities.

Addressing Training Needs

“We’ve done the work for years – have we become something or someone now?”

- Participants want the program to fund training needs. *“[The Department] requires that we train monitors whether we have the funds or not.”* They listed a number of professional, skills development and/or training needs of their personnel. For example:
 - Program administrator: strategic planning, finance and accounting, communications, proposal writing, and statistics.
 - Fishery manager: technical planning, data entry, and economic development officer certification/resource management diploma.
 - Lead monitor: data entry and computer skills.
 - Fishery technician: report writing, biological sampling, first aid, swift water and on-the-job training, and monitoring certification.
 - Fishery guardians: conflict resolution, land knowledge, resource management training and Indigenous resource manager career path.
- Participants shared history about the resource management curricula developed by Vancouver Island University, which was initiated by Conservation and Protection in response to the 1999 review of the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program. When the department could not fund the program, the university continued to build the program based on shared materials.

- Several communities are funding technician training. *“A lot more have been trained in our community, but we’ve taken that on ourselves. We’re going to Learning Institutes today to build capacity.”*

Other Components of Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program agreements typically include a comprehensive fisheries agreement which lists what Nations may fish. These agreements are negotiated outside of the technical and/or economic components of agreements, which is out of scope of the Indigenous Program Review.

- Participants point out the difficulties in separating the technical discussion from the policy discussion; especially, as comprehensive fisheries agreements are such a big part of the program. *“The policy review would inform a useful way forward on the technical side.”* They also see the need to have policy discussions. *“This is a great time to talk about these agreements. Government is recognizing inherent rights – they need to appreciate that we want to adjust these agreements.”*
- One participant expressed concern about the validity of departmental policies when First Nations were not involved in their development. *“When you start to impose departmental regulations, you have to realize that our people didn’t have a hand in developing these.”*
- A few participants would like departmental support to develop fisheries policies among neighbouring nations. *“It is difficult to manage and plan a fishery for all of the communities that are part of one agreement because ‘everyone has their own views about how this should be done.’”*