

What We Heard

“It’s really hard to know what the Department wants out of this program. I don’t know if they even know.”

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

“Resources are not just consumptive, they are venerated and intrinsically linked to us.”

- Each participant has an Aboriginal Fishery Strategy agreement, which is primarily used to support a fishery guardian program and a technical activity, such as the operation of a salmon counting fence or a salmon sampling program. One community’s agreement was put in place only eight years ago. Another has had a fisheries agreement with the province for more than 30 years
- Participants are in the program to be involved in fisheries and the protection of fish and marine resources. They have used the program to build capacity to make fishery-related decisions and to involve the community in these decisions as well as harvest negotiations.
 - Participants are interested in assuming more involvement in fisheries and resource management as well as data collection and science to better understand aquatic resources in their territories. *“We need a baseline of what’s out there and what’s being taken. We can’t harvest in a void of information.”*
 - Conservation is also of paramount importance, with one community choosing not to fish salmon because of declining stocks, even though they have an agreement to fish it. *“To make the decision not to fish salmon is fundamental for Indigenous people.”*
 - Communities have a natural resource or multiple departments to administer fisheries and resource-related activities, but these activities are largely funded through other programs. *“On its own, the Aboriginal Fishery Strategy program would flop.”*

Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

“If we don’t have the resource, we don’t have communities.”

- The majority of participants are issued a food, social and ceremonial fishing licence (communal licence) for a number of species. These licences are negotiated annually and permit fishing within specific areas. One participant questioned whether annual negotiations were necessary because the allocation never changes, but another noted that ‘newcomers to the file always try to enforce quota.’

- Most communities have both inland and coastal food fishery licences, with different conditions. For example, tags are distributed to communities for salmon fisheries.
- One participant does not have a food, social and ceremonial fishing licence, as they are just starting to explore the needs of their member communities.
- One community's fishery is restricted to an area that is also open to commercial and recreational fisheries, but they are not permitted to fish outside that area. *"This is a sore point for the Band. We'll be getting really good catches and, overnight, the commercial guys come in and we don't catch any more. Meanwhile, we can't go beyond the line."*

Community Food Distribution Programs

- Participants with food fisheries have distribution programs. For example, one has a group of people who fish for those who cannot, while another has a community freezer program to delivery country food to elders and to use for community feasts. *"If we do nothing else to improve the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program, we must have the community freezer program."*

Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

"We're leaning on the aquatic resource and oceans management program for the technical things we should be doing and it is also underfunded."

- Participants' agreements include data collection, catch and fishery monitoring, and enforcement of fishing rules. One also operates a counting fence to mark and recapture salmon, and test the health of fish through sampling. Another does more species monitoring, rather than formal stock assessments.
 - Catch data includes size, weight, quantity and other information. Data is shared with the Department and kept in the community. *"The catch log has a trust factor."*
- Enforcement represents a large part of agreements, but there is a lot of interest in doing more science and technical activities. For example, participants are interested in science to establish biomass baseline data and habitat restoration.
 - In some cases, technical activities may need to be more flexible to reflect the differing priorities of Nations with multiple member communities over larger geographical areas. *"Some want more monitoring and data collection because they have recreational fishing pressure, while others prefer action on invasive species because of the impacts to commercial fisheries."*
 - While not funded through the program, participants have a lot of technical capacity in their natural resource departments, which is used to build knowledge and revenue for their communities. One community is involved in the management plan for the marine protected area in their territory. Others are doing work related to invasive species, coastal restoration projects, and species at risk.
- Participants said when the program was first developed, it covered a range of technical activities, but this was cost prohibitive. One thought the activities mirrored

the workplan of their aquatic resource and oceans management group. Another suggested more technical activities would be possible with provincial collaboration.

Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

- Participants have extensive fishery guardian programs, ranging from four to 12 guardians, but they need more guardians to patrol rivers that are not covered by Aboriginal fishery guardians. *“We would like to have more of an enforcement role, rather than contracted guardians. Our people enforcing our resources.”*
- There may also be interest in having the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program cover more technical work, including data collection, in addition to their enforcement duties.

Co-management

“Reconciliation is more than social; it includes being able to co-manage.”

- Participants are striving for co-management of fisheries in their territories. While capacity has grown, participants would like more capacity building in this respect. They also want to be respected and ‘at the table’ in decision-making process.

Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements

“This is a big issue for Indigenous groups who are trying to get back into the fishery and have a meaningful place in it.”

- Participants are very active in commercial fisheries, holding both single- and multi-species enterprises. For example, one community has more than 40 vessels, designates about 4,000 harvesters, and has four fish plants. Another has 12 commercial fisheries enterprises which are designated licences by the community.
- Communities would like to be more involved in commercial fisheries, including through larger acquisitions, because members are interested in building their livelihood through the fishery. *“Now that the fishery is fully subscribed it either has to be allocated or we have to purchase it.”*

Allocation Transfer Program

“The value of what the allocation transfer program means for the Innu is the most important aspect. It’s been a foundation to grow.”

- The commercial activity of participants is largely a result of the Allocation Transfer Program. This economic component of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy is a vehicle for Indigenous access to the fishery through voluntary retirement of commercial licences. However, it does not guarantee funding and it is only a small pool of funds.
 - Some communities have also self-funded their fishery acquisitions.
- While participants value the Allocation Transfer Program, they do not think it can be the vehicle for economic reconciliation at current funding levels. *“With enough money, the program would be a good thing – but we’re talking \$700 million, not \$7 million.”* There are also high expectations for economic reconciliation to have a great agenda.

“It will take money and programming. The allocation transfer program has worked, but it needs more funding to do the real access.”

- Participant also note the expectation of the non-Indigenous commercial industry regarding economic reconciliation and potential changes.

Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative

“Room has to be made in the commercial fishery in Canada for Indigenous people: the timing is right, but the structure needs to be established.”

- Participants may differ with respects to the business and fishery capacity needs of their communities. Some have built significant capacity over the past 30 years, while others have huge capacity needs.
 - There is some support for a business development team and resource staff, as well as multi-year funding to invest in larger enterprises. *“We’d like a team to work with us so we can strategize how to best invest.”*
 - Others would like to see more diversification in the fishery, as well as market intelligence, to advance their commercial operations.
- Participants are spending time to decide how the new northern program may be able to meet their needs because they have not had access to these regional programs in the past. *“The expectation is really high. Demands on the northern program are going to be excessive and I’m not sure both sides share the same view.”*

Understanding Relationships

“We have professional relationships with the Department. There may be agreements and disagreements on policies, but it is collaborative and collegial.”

- Participants report having good relationships with the Department, but these are negatively affected by the high turn-over of officials and the time it takes to help new officials learn the file. *“There is no transfer of knowledge and we need someone who knows the ropes and is already oriented in their job.”* One found staff change-over ‘affected their reputation’ because the front-line worker did not know anything about their community. *“It actually impacted our final reporting and we felt like we’d done something wrong.”*
 - A few are also concerned about the limited number of science staff at the Department for key species, such as cod. *“There’s no way she can possibly respond to all of the demand and data samples.”*
- Participants also experience time delays getting information back from the Department both related to fishery data and sampling, as well as decisions. In one case, delays receiving data resulted in project funding being cut.
- Participants have relationships with key personnel within each sector of the Department, including resource management, conservation and protection, science oceans, aquatic invasive species, and aquaculture, as well as Indigenous programs staff and senior executives.

- One participant noted the change in the relationship with science over the past decade. *“It’s been a bit more difficult to engage in some areas of science, but it’s changing.”*
- Another shared how relationships developed based on the work of field and program staff at the Department. This includes having regular ‘armchair discussions’ with staff over a number of years to deal with issues and to share information. It also extends to local conservation and protection staff who have found innovative ways to bring training to fishery guardians. *“I think challenges with the program are more to do with national limitations, not regional people.”*

Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

“Programs are thrown at us – we’re not developing them and they need to involve us at the outset.”

- Participants want increased funding and more technical activities offered through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program, but they prioritize improvements to the economic side of the program. This means making a significant investment in commercial access to most benefit communities either through a renewed allocation transfer program or one of the commercial fisheries initiatives. It also requires developing clear principles about how the stocks will be shared so that *“everyone, including non-Indigenous industry, buys into it.”*

Training Needs

- Several participants support fisheries management training and capacity building. Other training needs identified included:
 - project management
 - project-specific technical training, such as to read scales and otoliths
 - annual training and frequent re-designation for fishery guardians
 - business skills development (orientation)
 - fisheries licensing and food inspection agency regulations
 - processes, procedures and decisions