

What We Heard

“The only reason we sign our agreement is to get some funds and employment; however, it’s not the agreement of our dreams.”

Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

“Every species that is commercial should be in these agreements.”

- Participants are issued a communal fishing licence as part of their agreements. The licence lists harvestable species requirements, seasons, quotas, gear requirements, and other licence conditions.
 - Only a few members fish the multi-species licence of one community, which has lobster, salmon, trout, scallops, tuna, snow crab, seals and whales. *“It may be in our inventory, but we don’t actually fish everything.”* The community has its own equipment, including four vessels, four-wheelers and lobster traps for individual use. The fishing crew distributes their catch to members throughout the year.
 - Another community used to have individual harvesters fishing and selling their catch, but this has changed in recent years. The community now distributes tags to each harvester based on community rules. Their fishery takes place in June and July, and between mid-August until November. Fish is processed in a nearby processing plant and the fishery manager picks it up so it can be distributed to community members through a communal office.
- Participants have natural resource departments to manage communal fisheries and administer the distribution of tags. The departments are run by full-time fishery manager who are also designated fishery guardians. *“Whatever that means, because I don’t have time to do field work.”* One community also has two full-time technicians to help in their daily operations, which they reworked from the five part-time workers that are in their agreement.
 - The responsibilities of fishery manager/guardians differ slightly by community. One plans, organizes, directs and oversees all natural resources related activities, including food, social and ceremonial harvesting, fishery, forestry, wildlife, environmental, mineral, land and water-based activities. The other manages food, social and ceremonial harvesting, responds to member questions and requests, delivers community workshops, attends all food fishing-related meetings, and keeps the community informed about species at risk, hunting rights and environmental concerns.
- Catch reporting remains an issue for participants. While both distribute tags to fish harvesters, they do not get catch reports. One has an online reporting mechanism and has tried using incentives to encourage community reporting, but it has not worked. *“Members believe it is their right to fish, so they question why they need to*

tell the Department about their catch. They only get the tags to stop from being harassed.”

Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

“The Government needs to be more proactive in protecting food, social and ceremonial allocations and harvesters in these fisheries.”

- First Nations communities in Nova Scotia are involved in Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn (Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative) which is seeking consensus on the best ways to implement Aboriginal and treaty rights for now and seven future generations.
 - Participants say the Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn negotiation office is trying to achieve no limits on freshwater and marine species in food, social and ceremonial fisheries.
- Participants are clear that there is not enough food fish for community members. *“The Department needs to protect our rights to access resources.”* One referred to a report that says food, social and ceremonial needs in Nova Scotia are short about one million pounds. *“Our salmon counts in the river are zero every year.”*
- Participants have different approaches when it comes to food fish allocations. One takes lobster for food from their commercial total allowable catch, while another keeps communal aspects separate. But both support dual fishing options to make fisheries more efficient and less costly.
 - One community is trying to negotiate their daily allocation of trout so it is different than the recreational fishery harvest of five per day. They would like to do this to save money on gas and the time it takes to travel and prepare for trips.
- Participants have organized food fish distribution programs. One community did extensive community engagement about five years ago so they would know which species members wanted in their food, social and ceremonial fishery program. While distribution is done house to house, there is also a community freezer for ceremonial purposes.

Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

- Participants have different technical components in their agreements: one only has catch and fishery monitoring, while the other has data collection, stock assessments, habitat restoration, fisheries enhancement and enforcement of fishing rules, in addition to catch and fishery monitoring. Some of these technical activities are funded, in part, by other programs.
 - The community with multiple technical components reported that data collection and fisheries enhancement are not meeting the needs of the community. To improve enhancement, they would like a fish ladder. They also want more enforcement of fishing rules for some species.
 - The community without technical components does not want all these activities in their agreement because they *“don't have capacity”* to undertake them and their aquatic resource and oceans management group is already doing them. However, the community would like more projects to be undertaken closer to their

community. *“The current set up seems to work better for other communities because they are closer.”* In the past, the community has had a summer student to do work on salmon in local rivers, using a fish ladder. They are also trying to get a rotary screw trap and training to be learn how to do this type of work.

- Participants work closely with their aquatic resource and oceans management groups. One does data collection, stock assessments, and catch and fishery monitoring with their group, including research on American eel and salmon.
- Participants want the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program to be more integrated with other organizations to do various studies, including on species at risk, as well as projects with other federal and provincial organizations. One recalls that agreements used to have a lot of habitat monitoring, but it was mostly seasonal and funding ended.
 - One community’s fishery guardians do environmental monitoring in partnership with other organizations. Habitat restoration and river monitoring activities are also done in partnership with the province.

Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements

“One thing we’re looking into is being able to sell our food, social and ceremonial catch to be able to provide for the community in different ways.”

- Participants support having an economic component to their agreements. One community is trying to negotiate with the Department to sell communal catches, but they feel the government is stalling on making a decision. *“They need to recognize our rights – it’s part of the 10 principles in their reconciliation agenda.”*
- Another wants improved access to emerging markets and training opportunities for new fishery professionals. They also want a fair process for new activities, such as surf clam.

Understanding Relationships

“There are still trust issues with the Department to overcome even after 26 years of being in the program.”

- Participants have relationships the Department’s Aboriginal programs manager to negotiate their agreement, with resource management related to catch data and the lobster fishery advisory committees, and with Conservation and Protection for joint patrols. Neither has a relationship with science at the Department as this is managed by their aquatic resource and oceans management groups.
 - One community has relationships with Environment Canada and Parks Canada related to habitat monitoring partnerships.
 - Another notes that while they attend lobster advisory committee meetings *“it’s not co-management, we mostly go there to listen.”*
- Participants have close working relationships with their aquatic resource and oceans management group. *“We work with our group so our members can see the benefits of river closures and other fisheries management activities.”* One aquatic resource and

oceans management group has a guardian program liaison coordinator to facilitate discussions between the guardians and governments to help communities take a more holistic approach to natural resource management.

- Relationships within the community are important to each participant. One holds up to nine community engagements each year so members know what is happening in the fishery and about any future plans. They also do school workshops to explain the fishery to youth and issue a quarterly newsletter.
- Participants also have relationships with the Mi'kmaq Fisheries Advisory Committee which feeds information to Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn and the Assembly. There are some internal communication issues in this relationship. *"Rights-based discussions are usually time-based, yet Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn sometimes does not address in a timely manner. In addition, when Fisheries and Oceans Canada decisions impact rights, they often do not go through proper consultation at that table."*

Co-management

"We need to do better at co-managing our resources because these are our rights. These resources are on loan to us; they're not owned by the Department."

- Participants want to be more involved in the management of their fisheries.
- Salmon is co-managed by Chiefs in Nova Scotia and the Province. While the Department funds the salmon management initiative, they are not involved at the decision-making table which develops new management plans annually. Rather, the Department does salmon restoration activities. This decision-making table includes two aquatic resource and oceans management groups. *"This is a joint effort to manage our rivers, including catch and release."*

Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

"The program needs to be integrated into a more enhanced program that covers everything: fish, environment, natural resources, land and water."

- Participants support improving the program in line with reconciliation and co-management, which may mean many changes to the current program. *"The Department is always telling us what we should do, but we are co-managers and we need to be involved."*
 - One community does not want catch and fishery monitoring in their agreement.
- Participants want the program to be better funded so they can provide better salaries to employees, build their infrastructure and fisheries programs, and purchase equipment. They also recommend that surplus equipment and supplies be given to communities to do their own projects.
 - One community would like more funding to be able to hire more community members into meaningful jobs. They also need more boats, better monitoring equipment, and the ability to talk to fish harvesters.
 - Another wants environmental monitoring to be integrated into the program.

- Participants want dual fishing options so they can make fisheries more efficient and reduce costs. *“Commercial for communal purposes.”* One community also thought the Department could explore directing by-catch to First Nations, rather than requiring that the fish be thrown away.

Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

“We need to have Aboriginal guardians actively out on the water and on the land.”

- Participants support having fishery guardians involved in multiple resources, as well as environmental monitoring. *“The Department may think guardians are all about fish, but it’s about everything.”* They also see a need for more involvement by guardians to support conservation and protection during Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishery disputes. *“There are only two or three fishery officers who work over a very large area.”*
- To improve the fishery guardian program, participants want guardians to have more funding and training to be able to manage multiple resources and the environment as a whole. This includes more training on environmental monitoring.

Improving Program Administration

- Participants want program funding to be at the beginning of the fiscal year. One community does not receive program funding until July, so the Band has to give the fishery department a loan until the funds arrive.
- Participants also want agreements to be consistent among communities.