

## What We Heard

*“We need a champion – someone very assertive to push this forward so we get going.”*

## Getting to Know Commercial Fisheries

*“First Nations people can develop the capacity to manage their own fishery – and we want to move in this direction.”*

- Participants shared the history of Indigenous fisheries on Great Slave Lake, which supplied fuel for dogs in every community to power their transportation to hunt and sell goods. *“Fishing is fundamental to the history of First Nations here. We fed each dog one fish a day, which amounted to about 60,000 lbs every year.”*
  - One participant recently completed a water-body inventory of streams, rivers and lakes in their territory based on traditional knowledge, which found that every single one was fished seasonally – in every season.
- The traditional domestic commercial fishery in Great Slave Lake is for whitefish, trout, and pickerel, and quotas are by zones. One participant said that while total commercial catches are currently about 1,000 lbs, they used to be 5-6 million pounds.
- Participants informed us that First Nations participation in commercial fisheries on Great Slave Lake had been essentially blocked until recent fisheries policy changes. *“Essentially, commercial fisheries around the lake were given to displaced fish harvesters from Alberta.”* This resulted in lost fisheries capacity within communities. The marketing monopoly of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation also led in low catch prices. *“The FFMC killed the industry and yet the government wants to continue using them. That doesn’t work for our Nation.”*
  - One community has successfully negotiated a communal licence on the lake, another is in the process of finalizing a communal licence for their community, and two others are just the starting the process of getting a communal licence. Along with the licence, communities have done some capacity-building by providing marine training to some members so they can fish safely on the lake.
- Communities worked hard to effect these changes and want to see more changes made to the Great Slave Lake Advisory Committee. This includes being more engaged in the management of the fishery.
  - In particular, participants support having a First Nations management plan for fish in the lake. The aquatic resource and oceans management group would also like funding to coordinate the development of this plan as they are being asked to do so without the funding. *“The AAROM program was not designed to deal with things such as the integrated fisheries management planning process. If the Department wants us involved, we should be funded to do so.”*

- Participants are also interested in improving marketing to get better prices for their fish, having a local processing plant, vertically integrating (such as through a restaurant), and building jobs and capacity within the community.

## **Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiatives in the Atlantic and Pacific**

*“I really like how the Institute Board talked about community pride being built from these programs.”*

- Participants learned more about the integrated commercial fisheries initiatives in the Atlantic or the Pacific and the arms-length-from-government business development team’s confidential business support services.
  - Several are interested in improving high unemployment rates by linking people to the commercial fishery and related businesses.

## **Developing the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative**

### Business Planning

*“We need to first determine what is sustainable production in Great Slave Lake – and then develop a business strategy based on that knowledge.”*

- Participants identified their business planning needs as wanting long-term strategic business plans supported by communities, long-term training plans with strategies to support harvesters gain specific skills, and plans for distributing benefits (e.g., jobs, revenues, profits, etc.) to community members.
- Participants identified specific business capacity needs as: business planning and marketing; establishing community management structures; following a fisheries management plan on the Lake; having a fish production and processing plant; more staff, training, and revenue to hire more employees; educating harvesters about local sales and product handling/quality control; succession planning; and incorporating the commercial fishery into community development plans. *“We need resources to bring in an HR person to coordinate the business planning and the strategic planning. We also need one more person in the office to work with fish harvesters.”*
- Participants emphasized the importance of building a sustainable management plan for the Great Slave Lake commercial fishery and investing in research to understand the impacts of development, such as Site C dam and the oil sands, on water levels and water quality to protect fish from becoming inedible. *“Our AAROM program needs to evolve to deal with or resolve these issues. Monitoring has its place, but we’ve identified a series of problems and it’s time for some action.”*
  - Participants also support rebuilding the community’s capacity to fish and sell commercially. *“We want to see our fish in the grocery stores and restaurants – anything to make it easier to get people on the water in the community.”*

### Ideal Business Development Team

- When considering the ideal business development team, participants want expertise in fisheries, business, finance, and training/human resources. They especially want strategic planning advice to reach long-term goals and help or mentoring related to new technologies or processes. They also want the team to have marketing and processing-production expertise and legal expertise. Most participants also want an Indigenous and/or community member on the team.

### Enterprise Scale, Strategic Planning, and Business Development Team Support

*“We need the business development team to change the marketing process to increase local sales to grocery stores and restaurants.”*

- Participants view the scale of their community’s fishery in varying ways. Some see artisanal only at present, while others see a combined artisanal/mid-scale commercial fishery. Five and 10 years into the future (and beyond), some see combined artisanal, mid- and large-scale commercial fisheries, while others see artisanal/mid-scale commercial only in the future.
  - Differing views of enterprise scale impacts business and strategic planning. For example, one sees the need to plan to address risks such as competition for local sales and forming a new process for marketing. Another wants their plan to include a marketing strategy that addresses transportation issues. Still another wants planning to create a locally known product.

### Industry Know-how and Marketing

*“The whole commercial fishery is an opportunity.”*

- Participants want to market their own fish: locally, regionally and to other places. They support the need to incorporate these plans into their business strategy. They also support diversification of products, including value-added fish products.
- Participants see opportunities in their fishery as including retail businesses, such as fishing supplies and equipment, production that uses the whole fish (all parts of the fish), eco-tourism to give visitors a Great Slave Lake fishery experience, having a fish monger at the wharf or in town, and potentially leasing licences. *“This is an opportunity to make our communities more self-sustaining.”*
- To be ready for these opportunities, participants want to build capacity in communities to fish and run a business, to learn how to manage a fishery, and to learn how to market fish products. This includes increasing education in communities so harvesters understand why changes are needed and the consequences of not making these changes. *“We’re going to have to shift the thinking to adapt to the business mindset because the Aboriginal community comes from an attitude of sharing.”*
  - One participant sees the need to hire a coordinator for fisheries-related projects and equipment for fish harvesters, including vessels and gear. Another thinks the community will need training and human resource strategies, such as using a champion or mentor to build their capacity to be involved in fisheries. Still another sees a need for new, efficient and low-cost fish plants to be distributed across the

lake to be able to serve local markets. *“Right now, there are no places to buy this fish.”*

### Business Management Training and Skills Development

- Participants reported that no business management training has been offered in their communities (or they are uncertain if training may have been offered in the past). They would like training to be given in fisheries operational management, financial management, project management, human resource management, strategic business planning, and informed decision-making. They also see value in managers being trained in marketing, fleet management and food preparation management.
  - One recommended that communities do an inventory of the skills and training of their membership. *“We need to hire in a fisheries management coordinator to spearhead this whole initiative and figure out who in the community could be trained to do this, so they are in place at the beginning.”*

### Harvester Training

*“A formal curriculum would help fish harvesters realize the benefits of all these courses.”*

- Participants said existing fish harvesters have taken fishing safety, boating safety and first aid courses, including small vessel operation, MEDA-3, and wilderness first aid. *“From experience, our harvesters are able to function at fairly high levels.”* They see a need for training so harvester can use diverse gear and be able to learn new ways of doing business. They also see value in captaincy training, training in health and food safety, learning about the weather, training in how to process fish properly and to code, vessel maintenance training, and training in fisheries regulations.
  - One noted that average education levels are low in communities and training should thus be linked to programs that help people upgrade to grade 12 levels.
- Participants prefer that training be given locally, with one noting that their most successful training initiatives are run out of the Band office. A few recommended that courses be linked to the local college campus and/or the Marine Training Institute and should incorporate traditional, hands-on learning. *“The ability to provide hands-on, practical training is better and more effective.”* Another thought local fish harvesters could be used to mentor or develop curricula or specific courses.

### Infrastructure Needs

- Participants reported that a lot of infrastructure is needed for their communities to participate in the fishery. This includes vessels, landing sites, community-based processing plants, community freezer, drivers / transportation, retail, and ice packing plants around the Lake.
  - A few communities have a community freezer, but they are not operational.
- Participants see a lot of benefits to the community once the infrastructure is in place. For example, one thinks communities will benefit by being closer to resources, building local jobs, and having more balanced fishing in the Lake’s zones. Another thinks the business will benefit by selling fish, gas and equipment at a local store,

maintaining equipment, and being able to earn income tax free. *“If you land here, it’s tax free.”*

- Most participants think their transportation needs are unique from other areas because routes are not fully developed. *“Transportation costs to southern markets are an issue.”* One pointed out that better transportation routes would also bring more tourists in to buy the products. Another said a better developed transportation corridor would help with product quality.

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

*“Young people need a reason to become commercial fish harvesters.”*

- Participants are excited about the new program and the benefits that it will bring to their communities.