

## What We Heard

### Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

*“Our local fisheries program takes the brunt of public interest instead of the DFO office.”*

- Participants<sup>1</sup> have diverse fisheries for species such as sockeye, chum, halibut, rockfish, sablefish, crab, clams, prawns, and herring, among others. Fishing may take place in rivers as well as in marine areas.
- Nations have challenges retaining individual fish harvesters due to the high cost of owning and maintaining fishing vessels. For example, one community’s fleet has gone from 17 to seven gillnetters and from six to zero seiners. Another community’s members pooled funds to buy the seiner used to fish sockeye.
  - One Nation started a traditional fisheries program to get people back on the water because people lacked basic fishing skills, as well as vessels. The program gives fish harvesters an opportunity to earn income to offset the cost of fishing for food as the Nation purchases the fish to distribute to the community. The program has successfully registered more harvesters since it began and is used to attract youth into the industry.
  - Another wants to create mosquito fleets within their agreement to offer more economic opportunities to members. *“Allocation Transfer Program licences reduce Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy funding for contribution of use, but we’re still expected to do the same amount of work. I’d prefer to build individual livelihoods.”*

### Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

*“Fish has a direct connection to health; especially, for Elders.”*

- Participants report that food fisheries do not always meet the needs of communities – and they are concerned about meeting future needs with growing populations. *“Our population has grown by 52% since 1992, yet our allocation is still the same.”*
  - One has difficulty getting more allocations to meet food needs. *“People may be harvesting for their family, but if they ask for more than four traps, we need to get a supplemental licence.”* They also find the Department’s adjacency policy does not respect traditional protocol agreements forged between Nations. *“It increases our costs and limits the ability of gillnetters to fish. They have to hire seiners.”*
- One participant shared how Central Coast Nations have started to address food fish shortages by combining community needs studies. *“We showed that we were not getting our FSC needs met for crab and we used it with DFO to make adjustments.”*

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<sup>1</sup> One Central Coast Nation participant attended a subsequent Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy workshop. Their input has been featured within this report to reflect the feedback of all Central Coast Nation participants.

## Co-management

*“First Nations have been resource managers since the beginning of time. Yet our history, teachings, and values are not taken into consideration in management plans.”*

- Participants manage many aspects of their fisheries, including designating fish harvesters in their communities.
  - Two Nations also have co-management arrangements with the Department for specific commercial fisheries, but they would like these arrangements for all fisheries. *“We have so much capacity to influence management, so we should be part of decision-making at some level.”*
  - Another participates in planning process to mitigate impacts and hold the Department accountable for its decisions. *“DFO shares information with us and we put it on the website for the rest of the community to see.”*
- One participant leveraged the development of conservancies in their territory to build a stewardship office and employ more than two dozen personnel to manage their resources. *“A strength came with this capacity. We hired a person to pull apart DFO science and developed data modelling summaries to co-manage the resource.”*
- Another has tried to explain protocols to departmental staff regarding their communal access and allocations. *“We had to tell DFO that we couldn’t go into someone else’s territory without their permission. We have policies that we need to follow.”*

## **Understanding Agreements**

*“You don’t get a licence if you don’t sign your agreement.”*

- Participants have all had Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreements since the program began in 1992, but they note that funding has not increased despite inflation.
  - One said their funding was reduced so the Department could support a society to include other Nations in their area. Another said their funding was cut for a counting fence. *“DFO then threw it in our face saying we hadn’t counted for 10 years – they were oblivious to the fact that we stopped because funding was cut.”*
- Some participants think the lack of program funds has led to an inability for communities to retain staff or to provide full-time jobs for staff. *“One of our biggest challenges is attracting quality people with such a low-wage scale.”*
  - One trained 18 community members in fisheries assessments, habitat and biology at a local college in 1992 and ended up hiring 12 of these members. However, the team now totals three staff: one manager and two field technicians. *“We have challenges retaining and recruiting people because DFO can offer more and better benefits even though we’re doing the same work.”*
  - Another has 22 personnel funded through the program, including guardians, biologists, field technicians, a mechanic and managerial staff, but only five or six are full-time employees. *“The rest are seasonal, but they make enough for employment insurance.”* The community also funds seasonal summer students from own source revenues.

- Still another used alternative sources of funding to build a resource management department to employ their team of more than 25 employees.
- Participants want more flexibility in agreements regarding the types of projects in which they may participate. *“We can’t just put things in our plan – we have to be able to show how it fits in the strategic plan.”* They also want to have more input into the reporting requirements. *“Reporting requirements are horrendous – we can’t get our newsletter out until reporting goes out, but it’s only to satisfy the DFO checkboxes.”*

## Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

*“We have way more information than DFO has. They come out a couple of times a year, and we do way more work than they do.”*

- Every participant has a catch monitoring program through their agreement. One has fishery guardians who are responsible for monitoring food, social and ceremonial, commercial and sportfishery fisheries in their territory. Another has guardian watchmen do their monitoring work.
  - One is concerned about losing their funding for sport creel monitoring. *“Funding is always being threatened because DFO tells us there is a lot of overlap information between lodges and watchmen. Our program is more than monitoring: it’s also about having a presence in our territory showing the lodges that we are here and we are watching.”* Another is working to address the impact of recreational fishing on crab fisheries in their area.
- Participants are all involved in data collection and stock assessment projects, but some want capital to upgrade their equipment and others want more funding to participate in advanced and/or additional research projects. For example, one would like funding to run an ARIS sonar data collection project, while another wants to do DNA sampling.
- Participants are involved in other technical work through their programs, but these activities are not necessarily funded through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy. *“We supplement AFS as much as we can, but there’s always a deficit.”*
  - One does paralytic shellfish poisoning monitoring and marine mammal response. Another is involved in oceans protection plan activities and emergency response. Still another has a ghost trap removal program.
- Participants typically share catch and fishery monitoring data with the Department, but one has *“a limit with what we share because we have not signed a communal licence.”* Another thinks the Department needs to make better use the data it gets because *“fisheries management staff don’t seem to be aware of all available data.”* Still another thinks the most useful place for data is with the Nations.
- Some participants want to be more involved in habitat restoration projects, including environmental monitoring and riparian planting and maintenance.
  - One has been working on stream restoration, despite limited habitat funding in the program, and difficulty accessing funding to maintain the activity. *“What needs to happen is a five-year projection on programs.”*

## Understanding Relationships

*“When I started, the working relationship with DFO was non-existent. Then, one officer came to our community and was instrumental in building the relationship.”*

- Participants have varying relationships with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, including program administrators, resource managers, scientists and fishery officers, with most reporting good relationships based on the time and effort of both parties. However, participants still see areas for improvement:
  - Two have had difficulty maintaining relationships when staff change or positions are cut by the Department. *“The responsibility of teaching DFO staff is being born by First Nations people. We spend a lot of time educating and re-educating DFO on our own buck.”* One also finds their agreement gets held up because regional staff are so busy and national staff do not know the issues. *“People in Ottawa who have never set foot in our territory hold up agreements.”*
  - One thinks program coordinators need broader responsibilities. *“They’re supposed to be my ‘go-to’ person, but they always say, ‘this isn’t my sector.’”* Another recommends more inter-agency collaboration. *“We have access to data when we are on a survey with DFO, but a person from Parks Canada does not. We end up having to ask on their behalf.”*
- Participants have differing opinions as to how and whether the Department may be using their information. One knows where their data goes at the Department and their *“responsibility to get the right data to the right sector.”* Another is not convinced that their data is used at all.
- Some Nations report having good working relationships with provincial officials and other federal officials at Parks Canada, Transport Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada. One also has good relationships with their municipality and district, as well as the forestry industry.

## Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

*“Change the name of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy to Indigenous Fisheries Stewardship.”*

- Participants want the program to be properly funded to be able to offer and maintain good career paths for First Nations people. They also want adequate funding to support their present and desired technical activities. *“This is a priority for us: we want to be out there ourselves to know what’s going on.”* This includes funding to maintain and upgrade their technical equipment.
  - One recommends a set-aside pot of funds for Nations that do not have an aquatic resource and oceans management group so they may conduct research projects.
- Participants want better fisheries management by the Department to protect fish for future generations. *“DFO doesn’t manage for conservation, only for economics.”* They also want to have a more prominent role in fisheries enforcement, science and

decision-making. *“First Nations involvement in fisheries management needs to happen where local knowledge and observation can play a role in management.”*

- Participants also want improved program reporting. One suggested using a similar portal for reporting that is used in the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk program. Another wants fewer reporting requirements.

### Measuring Success

- Participants measure the success of the Aboriginal Fisheries Program on its achievement of joint management of all species, meeting food fish needs, and Nations having the ability and funds to offer full-time employment to fisheries staff and guardians with benefits, sick leave and vacation.

### Skills and Training Needs

- Participants benefitted from training opportunities offered over the years to build the capacity of staff for their programs. This includes fishing safety and captaincy courses offered through the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative. However, they still noted the following skills and training needs:
  - Upgraded technician training “to a level that is acceptable” and guardian training that “leads to designation and diving certificates.”
  - Hands-on, technical training for maintenance workers and dive teams, as well as administrators and guardians.
  - Standardized guardian training and commitment to put out a booklet on what each fisheries program is doing.

### Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

*“We can’t do enforcement of fisheries rules, but we’re told to act like we have the authority.”*

- Participants all support the fishery guardian program; especially, as there are not enough departmental fishery officers near their community. *“Our guardians are taken out as DFO must have two people in a boat and there are not enough officers for that. We also share boats and trucks because of their fuel budget shortage.”* There is also frustration that fishery guardians do not have full enforcement authority to be able to deal with illegal harvesting. *“We see bucket loads of illegally caught fish at the community wharf, but we can’t do anything about it.”*
  - One would like to see a separate, stand-alone Fishery Guardian Program with the funding to build guardianship capacity across First Nations. Others want more designated fishery guardians to be working in their community.