

Blue Economy Strategy

Virtual Indigenous Engagement Series

Final Report

March 31, 2022



**NATIONAL INDIGENOUS FISHERIES INSTITUTE
INSTITUT NATIONAL DES PÊCHES AUTOCHTONES
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Message from the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute

Over the past 6 months, the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute (NIFI or “the Institute”) collaborated with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), specifically the Blue Economy Strategy Secretariat (BESS), to gather Indigenous insights on the emerging Blue Economy Strategy (BES). We hope that the feedback gathered and summarized in the following report can provide new insight to support the development of a more inclusive and accessible Strategy.

Our engagement approach focused on gathering detailed, place-based and community feedback on priorities and initiatives that should be expanded upon in the BES; however, the following points were raised, in one fashion or another, by all Indigenous groups during the engagement series:

- 1) The BES must respect, acknowledge, and uphold **Indigenous rights and title**, treaty rights, land claims agreements, and Indigenous governance structures;
- 2) Investments and partnerships are required to develop dedicated and focused **Indigenous training and skills development** initiatives to support the management of marine resources and marine economic development opportunities;
- 3) **Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK)** must be respected and integrated into all management processes related to Indigenous communities;
- 4) There is interest in expanding and fortifying Indigenous participation in **commercial fisheries and aquaculture** activities; and
- 5) Investments in new and existing **marine infrastructure** is required to support economic development, safety, and resource management within Indigenous coastal communities (particularly north of 60).

The IPR (Indigenous Program Review) was conducted by NIFI over a period of two years in collaboration with DFO’s Indigenous Program unit. The IPR was a comprehensive and national engagement that reviewed the DFO suite of co-management and commercial programs from the perspective of the Indigenous communities that introduced these programs.

The [IPR report](#) was formally accepted by DFO in 2020. Since then, NIFI and the DFO Indigenous Programs unit have been working together to implement the recommendations. The *Blue Economy Strategy What We Heard Report* (released in March of 2022) also reflects the statements and priorities expressed by communities during the IPR. Interests and priorities expressed by Indigenous communities are consistent across the IPR, NIFI’s engagement on the BES and the *BES What We Heard Report*.

Points 1) and 3) above are consistent with IPR and many other statements made by Indigenous communities relating to their desire to move towards more involvement in the management space and having their cultural epistemologies and political and legal rights be further recognized through the process of Reconciliation.

For point 2), NIFI, DFO and other Indigenous agencies are working together to put a dedicated training and skills development program into place commencing next fiscal. The Indigenous Training and Skills Development (ITSD) Hub will be a broad-based training program to support stated Indigenous aspirations in the aquatic space. Funding has been secured for the next

three years and we will see full implementation of the ITSD Hub within the next two or three fiscal quarters.

For point 4), DFO, NIFI and other federal and Indigenous agencies are also working on initiatives to support current program offerings and their expansion (i.e., AICFI, PICFI, NICFI and collaborative programs). Aquaculture, as an example, has become very popular in many communities, both inland and in coastal settings. Expressed interest far surpasses the available programs resources at the time of writing. NIFI and DFO will work together with the Indigenous agencies delivering these programs to further expand and enhance them, allowing for the broadest possible participation by communities in all parts of the country.

Point 5) reflects on the continuing challenges of supporting northern communities in their need for additional and improved infrastructure to support basic community requirements. We recognize that this is a sizeable and long-term project; however, we are confident that the BES can be employed successfully to support the recognized need in this region.

As the BES moves from concept to program framework and into implementation, we are certain that DFO Indigenous Program unit and NIFI – as well as our partners – are interested in collaborating with the Blue Economy Strategy Secretariat to establish community-based initiatives that reflect stated needs and interests.

Thank You

for your continued interest and participation in our activities.

Institute Board of Directors

John G. Paul | The Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew
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1. Introduction

The Blue Economy Strategy Secretariat (BESS), housed within Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), is leading the development of the Blue Economy Strategy (BES or “the Strategy”). The Strategy is currently being developed with other federal departments, as it is a “whole-of-government”¹ priority. The Blue Economy Strategy was federally mandated by the Prime Minister in 2019 and is intended to “enable Canada to grow its ocean economy to create jobs and opportunity for coastal communities, while advancing our conservation objectives.”² Once complete, it will provide a national vision and framework for the development, health and prosperity of the ocean economy, and will be used “to guide new federal investments.”

The National Indigenous Fisheries Institute (NIFI)³ was contracted by the BESS to conduct a series of virtual Indigenous engagement sessions on the emerging Blue Economy Strategy. This report was prepared for the BESS and summarizes the information and responses NIFI collected during the engagement series.

The feedback in this report is organized regionally. The five regions selected for engagement do not follow [DFO regions](#), but are based on the geographical boundaries, Indigenous governance systems and linguistic divisions of the three coasts. An appendix is attached that includes details on our engagement methodology and regional attendance.

1.1 Virtual Indigenous Engagement Series Approach

BES public engagement activities started on February 8, 2021 with the launch of the [Blue Economy Strategy Webpage](#) and the online publication of the Blue Economy Strategy Engagement Paper. Engagement activities were led by the BESS and federal colleagues and included a series of 40 roundtables, additional meetings, an online survey, and the receipt of 125 written submissions. The public engagement period closed on June 15, 2021.

In July 2021, NIFI identified a gap in Indigenous-focused engagement and participation within the BES public engagement activities. With support from the BESS, NIFI designed and facilitated an additional engagement series to ensure the development and implementation of the Blue Economy Strategy incorporates the diverse priorities of Indigenous communities across the country and is grounded in place-based realities.

NIFI organized a series of five (5) virtual engagement sessions between January and March of 2022 to hear from Indigenous communities in the following regions: Pacific, Atlantic, Quebec, Eastern Arctic, and Western Arctic⁴. These sessions were designed to gather place-based feedback from Indigenous communities regarding key priorities in the oceans sector. We also

¹ *Engaging on Canada’s Blue Economy Strategy: What We Heard*. 2022. pg. 5.

² The Honourable Joyce Murray, cited in *Engaging on Canada’s Blue Economy Strategy: What We Heard*. 2022. pg. 4

³ The National Indigenous Fisheries Institute (NIFI) was founded in 2017 and is rooted in the principle of collaboration between Indigenous groups and government: the co-development, co-design, and co-delivery approach to improving the programs and practices that impact the lives of Indigenous peoples.

⁴ See Appendix A for our detailed engagement approach, along with information on the date, time, agenda, and attendance numbers of each regional session.

sought feedback regarding specific barriers to participation in the Blue Economy, as well as recommended actions to mitigate existing barriers that should be included in the emerging BES.

This place-based engagement approach was implemented as an effort to recognize the immense diversity in the cultures, perspectives, context and needs of Indigenous communities across the country. Feedback and recommendations have been organized regionally to ensure this diversity is appropriately considered and respected in the development of the BES.

1.2 Alignment with Engaging on Canada's Blue Economy Strategy: What We Heard Report

At the time of writing, the Blue Economy Strategy was still in the early stages of development and the final structure of the Strategy was under development. In March 2022, the BESS published the [Engaging on Canada's Blue Economy Strategy: What We Heard Report](#), summarizing insights gathered during the public engagement period. We highlighted correlations between the regional feedback received during the Indigenous engagement series and the three overarching themes and 26 topics explored in the *What We Heard Report*. This engagement report provides important confirmation of the stated needs and interests of communities and their members, which adds substantively to the WWHR.

Given the emphasis placed on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples throughout the BES engagement materials, including the *What We Heard Report*, we are confident that the findings from our engagement process are in alignment with the primary objectives of the BES. We also wish to emphasize that while the feedback received during these sessions was extremely valuable, it is only the tip of the iceberg. This report, by no means, represents a comprehensive study of Indigenous priorities relating to the Strategy across the country. Regional participants strongly recommended that the BESS continue to engage with Indigenous communities throughout the design, development, and deployment of the BES.

2. Common Indigenous Priorities and Concerns Across Canada

The Indigenous communities we spoke with across and within the five (5) regions differ significantly in their cultures, governance structures, economies, and environments. These engagement sessions provided us with valuable insight into Indigenous interests from a regional and community perspective. We noted several common priorities and concerns across the five (5) regions that need to be considered in the emerging Blue Economy Strategy:

- 1) Indigenous Rights and Title:** Participants in every region emphasized that Indigenous rights and title must be respected and implemented in every aspect of the Strategy's drafting and implementation, including honoring and respecting all inherent rights, treaty rights, land claims agreements, and Indigenous governance structures;
- 2) Training and Skills Development:** Indigenous communities from coast to coast emphasized the need for long-term investment in marine-specific capacity-building,

training, and skills development, particularly in the following fields: science and research, data collection, monitoring and stewardship activities, and coastal tourism;

- 3) **Indigenous Traditional Knowledge:** Participants from all regions spoke about the importance of respecting and integrating Indigenous Traditional Knowledge into decision-making processes around environmental policy;
- 4) **Commercial Fisheries:** Participants in most regions spoke to the importance of supporting existing commercial fisheries and processing facilities, as well as investing in the development of new Indigenous fisheries operations, including aquaculture and seafood processing; and
- 5) **Marine Infrastructure:** Participants in most regions spoke about the need for investments in new and existing marine infrastructure to support economic development, safety, and access, including ports, harbors, roads, processing facilities, and internet infrastructure.

3. Regional Indigenous Priorities and Concerns

We summarized our engagement findings by region and separated the feedback into four topics or themes – economic, environmental, governance and other. For each of the five regions (Pacific, Atlantic, Quebec, Eastern Arctic, and Western Arctic), we developed recommendations for action by the BESS that reflect the feedback received.

We recognize that provincial and territorial borders often create arbitrary divisions across the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples, and that many communities have interests in multiple regions. People were encouraged to join whichever regional sessions they felt were most aligned with their community's interests and territories. For this reason, some participants may have attended multiple sessions.

3.1 Pacific Region

The Pacific region encompasses the 25,725 km coastline of British Columbia, as well as numerous watersheds and riparian systems inextricably linked with coastal marine ecosystems; this interconnection is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the Pacific salmon, the region's iconic keystone species. There are 198 First Nations in BC, most of which retain Aboriginal title and rights in respect to their respective territories.

Rights and obligations relating to Indigenous fisheries are well known within communities and many First Nations find it necessary to actively assert their rights in terms of the management and control of aquatic resources of all types. In BC, all coastal communities are fishing communities; interior groups remain reliant on migrating salmon stocks to maintain their cultures and communities.

3.1.1 Pacific: Economic Priorities

The discussion of economic priorities in the ocean sectors for Indigenous communities on the Pacific coast centered around commercial and food fisheries, processing, and aquaculture. Participants emphasized the importance of fishing for First Nations and pointed out that small-to-medium scale Indigenous fisheries are ecologically sustainable. The BESS needs to

support capital investments to enable First Nations to purchase fish from their own fishers and maximize the value out of their resources across the supply chain. Capacity-building to enhance the processing ability of local fisheries should also be supported.

There is a strong interest in sustainable aquaculture and many participants pointed out the need for federal and provincial governments to restructure their policies around aquaculture to remove impediments to the sector's sustainable growth. Policy alignment, streamlining of processes, and investment in aquaculture development is needed. Recreational and subsistence fisheries also need to be included and protected by the Blue Economy Strategy, as both food fishing and food security play a significant role in the economies of Indigenous communities.

3.1.2 Pacific: Environmental Priorities

The need for a coordinated strategy to respect salmon and support the recovery of wild Pacific salmon stocks was repeatedly raised by participants as a core priority for the region. Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and Western science must be the basis of environmental policy decisions. Participants expressed that those environmental policies should be developed through a co-management approach that includes the environmental priorities expressed by Indigenous communities.

There was support for Indigenous-led monitoring and stewardship (such as the Guardian program) to bolster informed decision-making based on ecosystem carrying capacity and health. Training and capacity-building is needed to support Indigenous-led marine science and data collection. Participants pointed out that there are many opportunities for employment in environmental stewardship and remediation work, through initiatives such as coastline clean-up, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, the use of kelp forests for carbon sequestration and ecosystem remediation, marine science and space-based regional ecosystem monitoring, erosion management, and fish stock restoration.

3.1.3 Pacific: Governance Priorities

Participants repeatedly emphasised the obligation of provincial and federal governments to respect rights and title, and to fully implement UNDRIP (the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and DRIPA (the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act). Participants voiced that First Nations' rights and title should be distinctly identified as a core principle of the Strategy, and the Strategy should be co-developed with First Nations, as opposed to a 'develop first, consult/engage later' approach.

Overall, participants expressed the importance of weaving existing laws, policies, landmark jurisprudence on rights and title, and the duty to consult into the Blue Economy Strategy itself, such that the Strategy implements and supports existing mandates and legal obligations rather than treating them in an 'ad hoc' manner. Participants specified that some of the existing laws, regulations, and policies that the BES should actively incorporate are: UNDRIP and DRIPA in their entirety, as well as landmark legal cases such as the Tsilhqot'in Decision (title has economic benefit), "The Sparrow Test" (First Nations are second only to conservation), the recent Nuu-chah-nulth decision (commercial fishing), and Yahey (cumulative effects), to name a few.

3.1.4 Pacific: Other Feedback

Many participants expressed the need for the Blue Economy Strategy to include freshwater systems, given the interconnectedness of terrestrial watersheds to the health of ocean ecosystems. Freshwater should be seen as ‘the 4th coast’ of Canada.

There were many questions around how the BES connects with other government programs and agencies, and a desire for more transparency and clarity about which departments are involved in its development and implementation. The existence of ongoing governance and operational tables on related issues was noted, and participants suggested that the BES should work as a funded additive to existing tables and initiatives rather than creating a new structure for communities to deal with.

There was a strong desire for clarity regarding follow-up engagement, next steps in the development of the BES, funding opportunities within the BES and how the BES would ensure that the Strategy develops in line with existing Indigenous governance and operational tables in the region. Participants emphasized that vague terms such as ‘reconciliation’ should be clearly defined in the BES with respect to rights, title, and legal precedents, as well as clarity on how it will be implemented.

3.1.5 Pacific: Recommendations for Action

- The BES must be written and implemented from a rights-based approach, respect First Nations rights and title, and actively implement UNDRIP and DRIPA;
- Develop clear, comprehensive, and consistent policies around aquaculture and provide investment to support sustainable aquaculture development in Indigenous communities;
- Provide stable long-term funding to support capacity development for Indigenous commercial fisheries and seafood processing;
- Provide stable long-term funding to support capacity-building and training, particularly with respect to Indigenous science, monitoring, and stewardship activities;
- Work with coastal First Nations to develop a coordinated, Indigenous-led strategy to support the recovery of Pacific salmon stocks; and
- The BES should support co-management governance practices to better monitor and steward the environment.

The above feedback and recommendations align with the following topics from the *What We Heard Report*: Natural Environment, Science and Data, Business Environment, Market Access, Regulatory Environment, Inclusion Diversity and Equity, Indigenous Peoples, Coastal Communities, Intergenerational Equity, Labour Force and Skills Development, Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Seafood Processing, Aquaculture, Coastal and Marine Tourism.

3.2 Atlantic Region

The Atlantic region⁵ encompasses roughly 42,000 km of coastline and includes the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island. This area has been home to the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik (*Maliseet*), Peskotomuhkati, Innu, and Inuit peoples since time immemorial. Notable treaties and land claims in this region are the Peace and Friendship treaties, and the Nunatsiavut Land Claims Agreement (also known as the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement Act).

Indigenous communities on this coast have a long history of fishing and harvesting for social, cultural, and economic purposes. The Marshall Decision of 1999 affirmed the right to fish for moderate livelihood. The practical implementation of this right is the subject of on-going negotiations between Canada and the Indigenous groups with rights under the treaty.

3.2.1 Atlantic: Economic Priorities

Participants emphasized the need to come up with a solution to moderate livelihood, as it remains a limiting factor in the development of commercial fishing operations for Indigenous communities. This is a strong example of why rights-based requirements, including the right to fish, must be clarified and upheld before and during the development of any economic strategy.

Participants expressed the need for more Indigenous business ownership, as well as corporate partnerships to reduce reliance on changing government mandates and funding, and to benefit from and guide corporate decisions and investments. Investment is needed to support the diversification of career opportunities in the oceans economy and support Indigenous participation in all ocean sectors, including aquaculture and marine tourism. This could be improved through funding for training and skills development, education, financial literacy, career fairs and support for youth to access a full range of careers in the ocean sectors.

3.2.2 Atlantic: Environmental Priorities

There was widespread consensus that the environment should be considered before the economy, and that management should be 'ecologically-based' rather than 'economically-based'. This approach aligns with Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and a traditional governance approach. Without a serious investment in the recovery of fish stocks, there can be no economic benefit. These investments must include funding for science and technology to support monitoring and decision-making. Indigenous Traditional Knowledge must be incorporated in the development of the Strategy. Overall, participants emphasized the need for holistic management, in which environmental ethics and limits are baked into any plan for economic growth.

⁵ Written materials for the Atlantic engagement session were provided in English and French, and live translation during the session was provided in French.

3.2.3 Atlantic: Governance Priorities

The protection and implementation of Indigenous rights and title must be a key pillar of the BES. The meaning of governance in the context of the Blue Economy Strategy needs to be fleshed out; without shared authority between Indigenous people and governments, there cannot be shared and collaborative governance. Existing initiatives to develop governance structures for traditional fisheries and resources in Nova Scotia should be considered in the strategy.

3.2.4 Atlantic: Other Feedback

Participants expressed a sense of ambiguity about the tangible actions and programs that will come out of the Blue Economy Strategy. Participants expressed the need for ‘governance’ and ‘reconciliation’ to be more clearly defined in the Strategy. Some participants expressed concern that assumptions had been made at a federal level about the priorities of Indigenous peoples and communities, rather than reflecting genuine concerns on the ground. A ‘distinction-based’ approach was suggested, which would involve the allocation of place-based and sustainable funding, set aside from the rest of the funding, to support the needs of an Indigenous Blue Economy.

3.2.5 Atlantic: Recommendations for Action

- The BES must be written and implemented from a rights-based approach, respect Indigenous rights and title, and respect existing treaties and agreements;
- Work with Indigenous governments and communities to define and support the implementation of moderate livelihood;
- Support job diversification by investing in education, training, and capacity-building;
- Both Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and Western science should inform environmental policy decisions;
- Support the establishment of more Indigenous-corporate partnerships; and
- Support the establishment and growth of Indigenous-owned businesses.

The above feedback and recommendations align with the following topics from the What We Heard Report: Natural Environment, Science and Data, Business Environment, Market Access, Regulatory Environment, Inclusion Diversity and Equity, Indigenous Peoples, Coastal Communities, Intergenerational Equity, Labour Force and Skills Development, Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Seafood Processing, Aquaculture, Coastal and Marine Tourism.

3.3 Quebec Region

The Quebec region⁶ (DFO’s Quebec region) encompasses around 13,323 km of coastline, on both the Atlantic coast—notably, the Saint Lawrence Seaway and the Gaspé region—as well as the Hudson Strait and part of Hudson Bay on the Arctic coast. Quebec has the largest volume of freshwater in Canada, an inextricable component of the coastal blue economy

⁶ *Written materials for the Quebec engagement sessions were provided in English and French, and live translation during the session was provided in French.*

notably illustrated by the Saint Lawrence River, Estuary and Seaway which flows into the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.

The Quebec region has been home to the Abenaki, Anishinaabeg, Atikamekw, Cree, Mohawk, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Inuit, Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Mi'kmaq and Naskapi peoples since time immemorial. Existing land claim agreements in Quebec include the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the Northeastern Quebec Agreement, the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement, and the Peace and Friendship treaties (Gaspé Region).

3.3.1 Quebec: Economic Priorities

Participants expressed the importance of protecting existing local economies such as commercial fishing operations, fish processing plants, retail, food service, distribution, tourism, and marine transport (i.e., ferry services). Reliable water access is critical to ensure that Indigenous peoples' subsistence rights to marine resources can be perpetuated and safely exercised. Investments in creating and maintaining diversified, well-developed infrastructure along the coast, including accessible, well-maintained ports and harbours, would support this goal. Existing networks of ports and harbours facilitate both commercial and social exchanges and are the basis for an economy focused on local development.

Participants also noted the importance of continuing to sustainably harvest marine resources for livelihood, even within future Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Participants expressed concern that conservation efforts might remove access to sustainable resource development, adding that livelihood is a strong motivator to protect the health and productivity of ocean ecosystems and community prosperity.

Investments to support the diversification of the blue economy, such as marine-specific training and a marine tourism working group, were suggested to help create meaningful employment. Participants noted that Indigenous Nations should be offered any new economic development opportunities first, and new development opportunities should be explored in conjunction with Indigenous Nations from the start so that they can benefit from and co-manage projects. Indigenous Nations should also receive priority for monitoring contracts.

Participants shared the link between freshwater and marine economies. The emerging Strategy needs to include freshwater economic opportunities. For instance, the St. Lawrence River is linked to the Gulf region, and this freshwater system contains a large potential for First Nation economic activity in the region.

3.3.2 Quebec: Environmental Priorities

Participants emphasized the importance of balancing economic and environmental interests to sustainably benefit from marine resources. Strong concerns were expressed that increasing traffic and pollution is negatively impacting the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples along the Saint Lawrence River by damaging fish habitats and archaeological heritage through shoreline erosion, ultimately introducing invasive species and impacting species at risk (such as the Beluga whale) through engine noise. Policies are needed to minimize marine

traffic on the Saint Lawrence River and to control pollution, including micro plastics and noise pollution. Food security must be an important component of the Strategy.

The mitigation of climate change impacts was also a clear priority, and it was noted that studies on the impacts of climate change must respect and incorporate ITK. To support this and other activities on the territories, traditional knowledge studies for each First Nation should be funded. Participants suggested further investment in the cultivation of seaweed as a carbon sink, and the exploration of opportunities to recognize seaweed as a carbon credit.

Support for Indigenous Protected Areas was expressed, however when it comes to Canada's marine spatial planning efforts, First Nations need to be consulted on these protected areas and plans should be co-developed with the First Nation communities. These protection plans can serve to better save guard species at risk and raise the education and awareness to the next generations.

Investments in science, monitoring and data collection are needed to improve population management tools. The development of tools and parameters for rigorous and permanent monitoring of the environmental conditions in the ecosystem, including ecotoxicological parameters, should be supported through funding for training, data collection, and science resources.

3.3.3 Quebec: Governance Priorities

Participants emphasized that Indigenous peoples must be recognized as stewards of the land and be involved in all decision-making discussions regarding the Blue Economy Strategy. Participants had questions about the coordination between this federal strategy and the provincial government's initiatives related to the blue economy. A partner table or steering committee was suggested to ensure that there is coordination and harmonization of existing programs and strategies in this sector at multiple governance levels.

3.3.4 Quebec: Other Feedback

Participants expressed uncertainty about what the Blue Economy Strategy could be, and whether it will function as an umbrella for other strategies and initiatives or simply function as a vessel for funding. There was a desire for clarity regarding how the BES will interact with other governance tables, programs, and initiatives, and on how decision-making on the substance of the BES will include Indigenous peoples. Participants suggested that the BES should operate as a hub and link to other provincial funding initiatives.

3.3.5 Quebec: Recommendations

- The BES must be written and implemented from a rights-based approach to respect Indigenous rights and title and existing treaties and agreements;
- Support existing commercial fisheries and invest in the development of Indigenous fisheries operations, including aquaculture and seafood processing;
- Ensure reliable access to ports and harbors by allocating BES funding to the maintenance of existing infrastructure and the creation of new infrastructure;

- Invest in marine-specific training and capacity-building for Indigenous peoples to diversify job opportunities in the ocean sectors;
- Include freshwater as a vital component of the Blue Economy Strategy;
- Develop policies to control environmental and noise pollution caused by marine traffic in the Saint Lawrence Seaway;
- Fund Indigenous Traditional Knowledge studies for all Indigenous Nations and integrate ITK into environmental policy decisions; and
- Prioritize Indigenous nations and communities in the allocation of monitoring contracts and other business opportunities.

The above feedback and recommendations align with the following topics from the *What We Heard Report*: Natural Environment, Science and Data, Business Environment, Market Access, Regulatory Environment, Inclusion Diversity and Equity, Indigenous Peoples, Coastal Communities, Intergenerational Equity, Labour Force and Skills Development, Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Seafood Processing, Aquaculture, Ports and Harbours, Coastal and Marine Tourism.

3.4 Eastern Arctic Region

The Eastern Arctic region⁷ (part of DFO's new Arctic Region) comprises a large portion of the Inuit Nunangat, including the territory of Nunavut, the region of Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut. The geographical area encompasses over 36,000 islands and a major portion of the Arctic coastline. The Inuit groups in this area include the *Labradormiut*, *Nunavimmiut*, *Nunatsiarmiut* (Baffin Island), *Iglulingmiut*, *Kivallirmiut*, *Netsilingmiut*, and *Inuinait*. Some of the main dialects of Inuktitut spoken in the Eastern Arctic are *Innuinaqtun*, *Nunavimmiutitut*, *Nunatsiavumiuttut*, *Qikiqtaaluk nigiani*, *Qikiqtaaluk uannangani*, *Aivilimmiutut*, *Natsilingmiutut*, and *Kivallirmiutut*, as well as numerous sub-dialects.

Treaties and land claim agreements relevant to this region include the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Northeastern Quebec Agreement, the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the Nunatsiavut Land Claims Agreement, and Eeyou Marine Region Claims Agreement.

3.4.1 Eastern Arctic: Economic Priorities

Participants noted that the North has some of the greatest blue economic potential in the country, but a lack of infrastructure and allocated funding makes it hard to realize. One of the main priorities for Indigenous communities in the Eastern Arctic is increased marine access and infrastructure, including ports, harbours, and access roads. Many participants emphasized that without improvements to infrastructure to provide reliable and safe access to marine resources, there is no way for the region to develop or optimize its blue economy. There is also a need for greater investment in emergency response capacity to mitigate both

⁷ Written materials for the Eastern Arctic engagement sessions were provided in English and Inuktitut, and live translation during the session was provided in Inuktitut.

the risk of oil spills and the risk to human safety inherent to any marine activities in the unpredictable environment of the North.

Concerns around equitable access and allocations to adjacent fish resources for the peoples of Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut, and Southern Labrador was a strong theme of the discussion. Participants flagged the need for an additional session to focus on adjacency as this topic falls outside of the scope of the BES, as well as issues relating to commercial fisheries access in the David Strait and adjacent waters (where people have access).

Disparity in investments in science and research in the North should be equalized, as increased research and monitoring is needed to understand the impacts of climate change and improve management activities. Indigenous participation in offshore economic activities such as fisheries and oil and gas should be supported. Increased investments in infrastructure, science, and processing facilities would help to support economic development for Indigenous communities in the Eastern Arctic.

3.4.2 Eastern Arctic: Environmental Priorities

Participants lamented the lack of comprehensive environmental and ecosystem monitoring in the Eastern Arctic and the Labrador Sea, despite the rapid pace of climate change impacts occurring in the Arctic. Investment is needed to build capacity and to create more research facilities and research positions.

While participants supported the protection of marine ecosystems and species, some felt that the Eastern Arctic is unfairly targeted for federal marine conservation targets, as the Arctic is considered 'out of sight, out of mind.' Support was voiced for Indigenous Protected Areas, and the integration of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in decision-making around environmental policies.

3.4.3 Eastern Arctic: Governance Priorities

Participants emphasized the importance of honouring management and governance treaties and agreements. The spirit and intent of the governance provisions within the respective land claim agreements in this region must guide the decisions, policies, and strategies of the government of Canada with respect to Arctic self-reliance and the region's social and economic development. Participants referred to the goals stated in Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, such as increasing Indigenous participation in the economy, promoting economic growth in the Arctic, increasing wealth retention in the Arctic, and reducing income inequality. These goals should be adhered to in the development of the Blue Economy Strategy.

3.4.4 Eastern Arctic: Other Feedback

Participants expressed the need for a clear definition of what 'reconciliation' means within the Blue Economy Strategy, and clarity regarding how the BES will align and integrate with other policies, programs, and agreements, such as the Arctic Policy.

3.4.5 Eastern Arctic: Recommendations

- Honor, respect, and implement all existing treaties, agreements, and respective policy recommendations in the Arctic;
- Actively support co-management practices in the drafting and implementation of the BES, as established by existing land claims agreements;
- Invest in marine infrastructure such as ports, harbors, and road access to allow for economic development and to improve emergency response capacity;
- Invest in science capacity, research facilities, and monitoring activities;
- Invest in seafood processing facilities; and
- Respect and integrate Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) into decision-making.

The above feedback and recommendations align with the following topics from the *What We Heard Report*: Natural Environment, Science and Data, Market Access, Regulatory Environment, Inclusion Diversity and Equity, Indigenous Peoples, Coastal Communities, Intergenerational Equity, Labour Force and Skills Development, Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Seafood Processing, Aquaculture, Ports and Harbours, Coastal and Marine Tourism, Ocean-based Energy.

3.5 Western Arctic Region ⁸

The Western Arctic region⁹ encompasses the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR), the homeland of the Inuvialuit. The Northern coasts of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, including the Beaufort Sea and the Mackenzie River Delta, fall within this part of the Inuit Nunangat. The Inuvialuit language is Inuvialuktun, which consists of three main dialects: *Uummarmiutun*, *Sallirmiutun*, and *Kangiryuarmiutun*.

The Inuvialuit Final Agreement is the main land claim agreement in this area and defines the boundaries of the Inuvialuit Settlement Agreement. The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation was established through this agreement to represent the rights of the Inuvialuit peoples and manage the affairs of the ISR as set out in the agreement. The six Inuvialuit communities in the ISR are: Aklavik, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk and Ulukhaktok. Each community has its own Hunters and Trappers Committee (HTC), responsible for harvesting rights and management functions defined in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement.

⁸ Participation in the Western Arctic session was low due to lockdowns caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of reliable internet accessibility in the region. Participants strongly emphasized the importance of bringing all six HTCs and representatives from the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to the table together, so that the correct representatives can speak for their communities and jurisdictions. Participants clearly expressed that they could not speak for other communities, and that the correct representatives need to be present to facilitate respectful engagement in the ISR. We attempted to organize meetings with representatives from the six HTCs following the scheduled session, however, only one meeting was scheduled and further engagement by the BESS is required.

⁹Written materials for the Western Arctic engagement session were provided in English and Inuktitut, and live translation during the session was provided in Inuvialuktun.

3.5.1 Western Arctic: Economic Priorities

Participants expressed interest in the possibility of a test fishery in the Mackenzie Delta and emphasized the importance of food security. Interest in selling fish from annual harvesting in Shingle point was mentioned, but there is a lack of clarity regarding the fishing regulations associated with selling.

Participants noted the existence of a food processing plant in Inuvik, which is currently the only place local harvesters can send game or fish to be processed. Serious investments in physical infrastructure, such as ports and patrol boats, as well as internet connectivity, are necessary to improve emergency response and safety, particularly as the Northwest Passage continues to open due to climate change.

3.5.2 Western Arctic: Environmental Priorities

Major environmental concerns in this region include the rapidly escalating impacts of climate change, as well as marine food safety and food security. The IRC has created the [Inuvialuit Settlement Region Climate Change Strategy](#), the recommendations of which should be integrated into the Blue Economy Strategy. Participants expressed concern over marine traffic and human activities causing damage to the environment. The McKenzie Delta plume is causing extensive damage and must be monitored and studied. Participants also expressed concern over the low capacity for spill response in the region.

Concerns were expressed about traditional food fish being opened to commercial fishing, particularly the Dolly Varden species which is currently protected under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Participants articulated the need for funding to support better data collection and monitoring activities from the harvesters about the state of the land and species, and to facilitate increased information sharing amongst the HTC's. Management activities should be led by Inuvialuit communities, and each community has its own conservation plan. Participants expressed that they support conservation, but the two MPA processes that have taken place in the ISR were rushed and did not adequately involve communities in area selection.

3.5.3 Western Arctic: Governance Priorities

Participants emphasized the need for existing governance and management structures of the ISR to be recognized and implemented. The Inuvialuit Final Agreement must be honoured, and the IRC and the six HTC's need to be involved in decision-making related to the blue economy. The Beaufort Joint Management Framework must also be upheld by the BES. Canada needs to fulfil the promises it made under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, for the well-being of the youth and future generations.

3.5.4 Western Arctic: Recommendations

- Honour, respect, and implement the Inuvialuit Final Agreement and related policy recommendations in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region;
- Organize a follow up session in the Western Arctic to ensure that the IRC and all six HTC's can come to the table and voice their interests;

- Invest in marine infrastructure and internet connectivity in the ISR to improve safety and socio-economic conditions; and
- Invest in data collection and sharing between HTC's to increase monitoring and management capacity while respecting Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ).

The above feedback and recommendations align with the following topics from the *What We Heard Report*: Natural Environment, Science and Data, Regulatory Environment, Indigenous Peoples, Coastal Communities, Intergenerational Equity, Labour Force and Skills Development, Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Seafood Processing, Ports and Harbours.

4. Conclusion

The key takeaway of our engagement is that the interests, priorities, challenges and needs of Indigenous communities differ vastly across coastal regions, which are uniquely shaped by geography, population, history, and culture. Specific recommendations to address some of these unique interests and priorities have been shared in each regional section and common points across the country are mentioned in [Section 2.0](#).

Throughout the engagement sessions, participants had similar questions and concerns about the function and drafting process of the Blue Economy Strategy. Participants in all regions wanted to know what the process of developing and drafting the Strategy will look like, and how it will involve Indigenous peoples. In every region, participants highlighted the need for clarity and transparency regarding: the role of different governmental departments in the BES, a schedule for follow-up and further engagement, next steps in the development of the Strategy, funding opportunities within the BES, and how the BESS would ensure that the Strategy develops in conjunction with existing Indigenous governance and operational tables in each region.

- **To address this concern, we recommend that the BESS issue a statement clarifying the next steps of the engagement and drafting process and create a plan for Indigenous inclusion in this process.**

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is presented as a core pillar in the Blue Economy Strategy, but Indigenous participants across the country wanted to know exactly how the Blue Economy Strategy will define and implement this definition of 'reconciliation'.

- **To address this concern, we recommend that the future draft of the Blue Economy Strategy clearly defines the meaning of reconciliation and explains how it will be implemented through the BES.**

While the unique rights and position of Indigenous peoples must be respected in the drafting and implementation of the Blue Economy Strategy, participants emphasized that the interests and priorities of Indigenous peoples should also be reflected throughout the entirety of the Blue Economy Strategy, not merely as a sub-section or special case.

- **To address this concern, we recommend that future engagement with Indigenous peoples must include prompting questions for all themes and topics explored in the emerging Blue Economy Strategy to ensure that people have an opportunity to provide feedback on all facets of the BES. Additionally, Indigenous insights and priorities should be woven into all aspects of the final Strategy and not separated into a standalone “Indigenous section”.**

Further engagement is needed in the Western Arctic, as very few people were able to attend our engagement session due to Covid lockdowns and low internet accessibility. We do not feel the feedback collected adequately reflects salient concerns in the region.

- **We recommend organizing an additional engagement session in the Western Arctic with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and all six Hunters and Trappers Committees.**

It will be critical for the Strategy and corresponding implementation plan to harmonize with established governance processes and initiatives at the federal, provincial, Indigenous, and municipal levels. It would likely be more efficient and accessible for Indigenous communities if the BES formed partnerships with existing programs and Indigenous operational and governance tables to distribute funding, rather than creating a new funding mechanism which communities may not have the time or resources to engage with. Further and ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities and leaders is required to ensure the emerging BES is grounded in place-based perspectives and reconciliation.

Appendix A: Engagement Methodology and Participation

Initial meetings between the BESS and NIFI staff established the five regions for engagement, based on the geographical boundaries, governance systems and linguistic divisions of the three coasts. Regional committees were assembled for each of the five regions to guide our understanding of regional context, co-develop and validate our engagement approach, and support targeted outreach across regional networks. These committees were made up of four to five Indigenous leaders and connectors from each region. We created a website to support outreach and promotion of the virtual engagement sessions. Invitations were emailed out to regional lists by the NIFI project manager, DFO project partners, the regional committee members, and additional members of the NIFI network who provided outreach support.

Engagement was conducted through a 90-minute virtual session in each of the five regions. Live translation was provided in *French* for the Quebec session, in *Inuktitut* for the Eastern Arctic, and in *Inuvialuktun* for the Western Arctic session. Each session included an overview of the Blue Economy Strategy from a BESS representative, a question period, and a closed Tier-1 discussion among Indigenous representatives, community members and NIFI staff.

To prompt feedback and discussion during the Tier 1 portion of the session, NIFI provided participants with a summary of regional priorities organized into three categories: economic priorities, environmental priorities, and governance priorities. These summaries of regional priorities were drawn from previous engagement data provided by the BESS, as well as relevant reports shared with us by regional committees. Using these ‘sketches’ of regional priorities to communicate what we had heard so far, we asked participants to identify gaps and share any missing key priorities in their communities through the following engagement questions:

- Are there other key **economic** priorities for your community across the ocean sectors?
- Are there other key **environmental** priorities for your community across the ocean sectors?
- Are there other key **governance** priorities for your community across the ocean sectors?

We then asked participants to identify specific actions the Blue Economy Strategy could take to benefit their communities and remove existing barriers to participation by answering the following questions:

- What types of initiatives could be supported through the BES that would benefit your community?
- What are/how could some of the barriers be removed through the BES?

Participants shared feedback in several ways: (1) verbally and in the Microsoft Teams chatbox during the virtual engagement sessions, (2) through an online feedback form which was re-circulated after the session and included the same presentation questions, and (3) in one-on-one phone conversations with NIFI staff. Written materials were provided to participants at least one week prior to the session. These materials were available in English, French, and Inuktitut to make engagement as accessible as possible.

It is important to note that while we used the three broad categories of economic, environmental, and governance priorities to help focus our engagement, these categories are clearly interconnected. Many community members pointed out that effective management of the oceans must take a holistic view of governance, a healthy environment, and the economy.

A summary of dates, times and attendance numbers for each regional session is summarized below.

Table 1: Date, Time, and Attendance for each Regional Indigenous Engagement Session.

| Region | Date | Time | Attendance |
|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Pacific | January 11th, 2022 | 10:00 – 12:30 pm PST | 70 |
| Atlantic | January 13 th , 2022 | 1:00 – 3:00 pm AST | 53 |
| Quebec | January 18 th , 2022 | 1:00 – 2:30 pm EST | 39 |
| Eastern Arctic | February 9 th , 2022 | 1:00 – 2:30 pm EST | 31 |
| Western Arctic | February 10 th | 1:00 – 2:30 pm MST | 16 |