



What We Heard

“Having seen so many projects here start big and fail, I suggest starting small and building sustainably from there.”

- Participants are unanimous in their support for the new Northern program to be equally beneficial for, and represented by, both Gwich'in and Inuvialuit Settlement Area communities. *“Everyone has to have a niche in this. It can't be a competitive, dog-eat-dog exercise.”* They also want the voice of all involved communities to be heard in the planning process.
- Participants need a number of issues to be addressed in order to support their commercial fishing aspirations. For example:
 - There is uncertainty as whether commercial activities will be permissible in areas that were set aside exclusively for subsistence in land-claim agreements. *“Those areas are not open for commercial purposes, so it maybe has to be worked on.”*
 - Data about fish species and biomass are lacking in the region and communities would like to know how and when this information will be gathered. *“We need to know if this is sustainable, but we don't have up-to-date stock assessments.”* Some would also like to be able to assess how fishing in the MacKenzie River could be impacted by large-scale activity in the Arctic Ocean.
 - While there is a lot of interest in having a local fish plant, participants are aware that there are laws and regulations regarding food processing. They also question why local processing methods are not recognized by health authorities; especially, for smaller, artisanal-level fish processing plants. *“We've been processing like this for generations.”*
 - At present, commercial fishing is impeded by licensing rules. For example, one community spoke about the expense and hardship for local harvesters to have to come to Inuvik twice to be able to get their licence. *“Anglers can buy their licence at a store. Why do we have to wait for days for approval before we have to come back to pick up the licence?”* There are also some fishing areas that have been negatively affected by transportation routes and industry developments.
 - In some cases, the relationship between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and communities needs to be improved before the new program can get underway. *“You need to get rid of the barriers impeding the relationship.”*
- Participants are part of land-claim agreements. As such, there are resource management organizations in place that would like to be more involved in fisheries management. This includes issuing licences and permits. *“We need to find ways to get resources to manage the co-management system in the settlement areas. Our Board is supposed to be involved in issuing licences and we are working with [the Department] to create that aspect.”*

- There is strong support for co-management to be run by an Aboriginal organization. *“We don’t want people to feel like they’re always answering to someone else. That’s the battle now.”*
- Participants underscore the importance of incorporating traditional knowledge into commercial fisheries planning. They also support the need to invest in the protection of traditional knowledge by involving youth in fishing-related programs.
- Some participants are eager for the Northern program to get started. They see a number of possible economic ventures, including fish by-products, such as roe, and artisanal products made from fish scales and fish skins. *“The sky’s the limit with what we can do with fish.”*
- However, participants recognize that some internal work may still be required before everyone will be ready. Some, for example, stress the importance of having community consultations to ensure that everyone understands what may be possible in terms of opportunities. *“We need to do some more talking to get everyone onside before we go forward.”* They also see a need for funding to build capacity, to support community guardians and monitors, and to get their fish into local stores and local markets.
- Some participants would like to learn from other northern communities that have successful commercial fisheries, such as Cambridge Bay, as well as from those who have commercial char quota. *“We need to learn about the actual selling of fish. How do we get up to speed as quickly as possible?”*