

What We Heard

“When we manage and own the resource, that’s when things are going to change.”

- Participants received funding through the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative to set up and manage their commercial fishing enterprises or for co-management activities, such as fisheries management strategies.

Getting to Know Commercial Fishing Enterprises

“My dream is to see boats out in the water with First Nations persons at the wheel.”

- The program has been used by some participants to set up a commercial fishing enterprise and develop its core governance structure, business structure, policies, procedures, and strategic planning. It has also been used to support enterprise operations, including the salaries of a business manager and/or administrator, technical team activities, and commercial access.
 - Other participants are using the program to fund a biologist or community liaison worker, and/or other collaborative fisheries management activities.
- Many participants are striving to achieve the goal of getting community harvesters fishing and do not want enterprises leasing licences. *“I thought the goal was to see if we could make the fishery viable. This seems to have shifted over the years. It’s just a business – and we want to see our guys get the proper benefit from it.”*
 - Participants blame the Individual Transferable Quota system as the reason why enterprises decide to lease their licence or quota. *“Everyone used to have a job fishing, but we don’t have that anymore. The quota system killed it.”*
- Several participants are focused on becoming owner/operators in the fishery: *“They always make the money. Fishermen make pennies compared to them.”* They point to the success in Atlantic Canada in retaining small boat owner/operators and would like to see it in the West. *“The Minister said, ‘I’m very proud today because owner-operator is the law of the land.’ They’ve done it back East, so why not here?”*
 - One participant also thought a Pacific Fisheries Fund should be created to match the one in the Atlantic *“to restore coastal and inland fisheries on our own terms.”*
- More than one participant is concerned about foreign-owned vessels and processing in Canadian waters. Several examples of how this policy is negatively impacting Indigenous fish harvesters and processors was given during the workshop. One participant called for an assessment of these impacts.
 - The impact of open-pen fish farms and logging on wild fish and spawning habitat was also raised a number of times. *“We’re always talking about how we’re going to catch what’s left, not about how to fix the problem. We’re poisoning the very sustenance that kept us going for centuries.”*

Improving the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative

“The whole program is a recipe for us to fail and we don’t want to fail.”

- Participants had a lot to say about where the program has gone wrong and where it needs improvement:
 - Commercial fishing enterprises were given low-value licences and aging (or non-functioning) vessels through the program. As a result, more than one person referred to their operation or vessels as a burden. *“We have one vessel that we got stuck with that is high maintenance. We’re trying to salvage her, but she’s not even moving.”*
 - The money received through the program arrives too late in the year: often in November. *“We hire based on what we can afford when we receive the funds.”* Structuring the program around the fiscal year was also viewed as artificial and *“setting enterprises up for failure.”*
 - The funding is insufficient for staffing needs, infrastructure repairs, and desired goals and projects. *“What little we have each year is put towards maintaining rather than growth. Where is the path for us to be managers of the fishery?”*
 - Proposals and reporting are too onerous and duplicative across programs. *“We need to unify fisheries funding to have a one-stop shop for proposals.”*
 - There number of fisheries-related meetings for enterprise managers has increased. *“We’re spread too thin with all of these meetings – and then, we’re crashing mystery meetings being held separate from First Nations.”*
 - A few participants spoke about having their program funding rejected: *“We would like to be able to submit multiple proposals each year so at least we’d end up with something.”* Several participants thought clearer criteria for the program and funding opportunities would ensure proposals would be accepted.
- Several participants questioned the overall success of the program. *“PICIF has been ‘hit and miss’ for us.”* A few wanted to know exactly how the program was benefitting communities: *“What’s happening at the community level? Are harvesters out there fishing? What are they earning? What are the holdings in our communities?”*
- While the business development team is not viewed an invaluable, participants questioned the team’s expertise and terms of reference. *“One of the hardest things in dealing with the [team] is to get them to understand our fishery. In my opinion, they have zero knowledge of the fisheries.”* One participant would like an opportunity to rate the team and their services. Another would like to see the budget for the team used elsewhere in the program. *“We’re very unhappy with [them]. They have over-inflated salaries for the work they do.”*
- Several participants support increased collaboration amongst commercial fishing enterprises. *“We need a real, Tier 1 forum for enterprises to communicate and work together.”* One participant thought an enterprise co-operative or association could be created. *“What if only one had access, another was used for processing and another for marketing? We could develop interrelationships so we’d all be successful.”*

- The different ways in which program funding are used raised questions with some participants. Those who receive co-management funding are also uncertain as to whether the program will continue to be used in this way. *“We’ve been told that there will be no more co-management funding and I don’t want to refight for these funds. They should be automatically redistributed through [the aquatic resource program].”*

Improving Program Administration

“It’s your job to make sure people know what they’re there to do. Success begins with the staff.”

- Many participants are concerned about the lack of knowledge departmental staff have about the fishery and the program’s direction: *“We often hear, ‘We don’t know what’s going on in Ottawa’. Even when the feds or the Province state their goals, when we sit down with staff, the people don’t know what you’re talking about.”*
- Some participants are also concerned about the messaging brought to program recipients in May related to graduation and program funding ‘threats’. *“I want to make a motion that we don’t want graduation to be part of this program. It is disruptive and it is a threat.”* More than one questioned how the program could be expanded without cutting funding to present participants.
- Several participants shared experiences of how their proposals are delayed for small wording changes made by different staff members. *“I still don’t have my funding for this year – I have to draw from the bank and pay interest – meanwhile, DFO is wordsmithing my funding proposal.”* One participant called for a proposal template to be created and for a list of approving personnel to be available.
- A few participants felt the Department and/or the business development team pushed them into using program funding for purposes other than what was intended. Another felt the government was trying to put a wedge between First Nations enterprises and industry. *“We were being told ‘they don’t want us at the table’ and then we show up and industry says, ‘It’s about time you showed up to this table’.”*
- One participant shared their experience of having the Department use the program in court as the licence to fulfill Aboriginal Rights. *“This is an interim measure, without prejudice – that’s what they said when the program first started.”* Another reminded the group of the importance of both truth and reconciliation, not reconciliation alone.

Identifying Enterprise Needs, Milestones and Success Factors

Needs

“We need to purchase access we want, not just what’s left over. We end up buying that stuff, then we have to research to figure out what to do with it.”

- The top priority of the majority of participants is access to more fish through licences and quota, or funding to buy licences and quota. *“We didn’t have initial access and licences have since gone up and we can’t buy it.”* Participants were clear that access should be favourable, capacity-building, and high-value. One person recommended that the Strategic Partnership Fund be used to acquire these licences.

- Several participants spoke about the importance of fish for food and the future of First Nations communities, and were thus focused on rebuilding stocks.
- Several participants have infrastructure and equipment needs, such as fuel stations and wharf repairs, and many need fully functioning vessels. More than one person spoke about their aging vessels, which were acquired when the program began.
- Participants were unanimous in the need for timely approval of proposals and timely funding. They also wanted confirmation that their funding would not decrease if the program was expanded to other recipients.
- Participants saw an urgent need to develop strategies to get youth involved in the fisheries. *“Hopefully, we’ll get some young people excited in the fishery and they can make a livelihood in it.”* Many also strongly support Indigenous guardians.
- Several participants would like a fisheries licence bank to be created. One participant thought vessel length restrictions should not apply to First Nations fishing enterprises.
- Participants who receive co-management funding identified their needs as sufficient funding and clear direction of the purpose, mandate and outcomes of the program.

Milestones

- Participants listed a range of milestones for commercial fishing enterprises: from more First Nations-owned vessels to diversified business ventures to key licences.
- Co-management funding recipients listed their milestones as program performance management strategies, a long-term vision for the program, and consistency with the aquatic resource and oceans management and Aboriginal fisheries strategy programs.

Success factors

- Participants defined success as 100% ownership of access, increased employment for First Nations in the fishery, restoration of the Indigenous fleet, and program support for new licences. *“We need to OWN the licences – no more access agreements.”*
- Participants also viewed success as no longer being part of the program. *“Our success is defined as ‘not needing DFO funding’.”*
- Those who receive co-management funding listed success factors as increased funding, adequate staffing, timely agreement and funding transfer, and connected Indigenous programs. Success was defined as *“true co-management collaboration and mandated governance over Indigenous fisheries within Territories in the region.”*

Meeting Industry Priorities, including through Partnerships

“The program has to support the choices of the community or they don’t work.”

Diversification

- Several participants applied for diversification funding through the Pacific Commercial Fisheries Diversification Initiative or the Aboriginal Aquaculture in Canada Initiative, but only one person actually received funding.

- The experiences of participants who did not receive diversification funding were similar: the application process took a lot of time, the business development team and Fisheries and Oceans Canada had different interpretations of what would be funded, and participants felt they were being pushed to apply for something other than what they wanted to do. *“The funding went to two or three people in the end. The process was secretive, competitive, ridiculous and non-collaborative.”*
- One participant thought the diversification programs created a ‘vulturistic’ industry dynamic: *“We walked away from a proposal because we realized it wasn’t an appropriate for our society. We would have been exposed to a terrible risk – and yet, they were trying to hustle us through it.”* Another participant thought the aquaculture diversification program was a conflict of interest and designed to benefit only one organization.
- Participants still saw the need for diversification funding opportunities as long as the programs had clear guidance and parameters.

Marketing and Market Access

“All this talk of marketing is moot without the fish. I don’t know any fishermen who can sell their fish on the market because we can’t get the supply.”

- Many participants thought their enterprises were not yet ready for marketing activities. A few shared past experiences or stories of enterprises that had tried marketing their product with insufficient knowledge and preparation, and had failed.
- One participant has branded their products. Another pointed to the value of using barcode labelling with traceability information to reach niche markets.

Access to Capital

“We don’t want to borrow capital with no fish to sell.”

- Most participants did not think they were ready to pursue capital funding, even though they wanted to buy vessels, equipment and licence access. One participant thought this was more of a large-scale industry priority as opposed to community fishing enterprises.
- One participant who was interested in gaining access to capital to improve their vessel explained that they could not get it through the program because they could not provide assurance that vessel improvements would result in more profits.

Future Training Plans

“Part of the solution is futuristic planning at least 50 years forward.”

- Many participants praised the training component of the program and its benefits to fish harvesters. *“We have a database set up for harvester training so we know what they need.”* But some are not enthusiastic about the training: *“I wasn’t trained in the classroom; I was taught by my Dad. But I had to take this course and that course – even for mentoring.”* One participant thought training costs took enterprises away

from their main goals: *“The courses go on and on and on. There’s limited opportunity to do what we want to do: buy more licences.”* A few others thought the program had trained people for jobs that were not there.

- Participants see a need for career progression paths to be aligned with training plans. They also strongly support youth training strategies to get young people involved in fisheries-related employment.
- Participants agreed with a lot of the training needs listed for harvesters. However, they thought marketing, data entry, net building and mending, and vessel-type skills should be added to the list. They also thought business management needed a deeper understanding of fisheries policy and regulations, quota management and multiple species.
 - One participant recommended that appropriate funding for higher-level training be available, such as for fishing master and diver training. Another recommended more mentoring and practical ‘on-the-boat sea-time’ should be offered. A few others wanted historical and cultural training added.
 - One participant cautioned that training should not be called apprenticeships as these *“are too limiting, in the end, for employment.”*
- Fisheries-related careers suggested by participants included: divers, mechanics, engineers, oilers, enforcement officers, mentors, and marketing managers.