What We Heard

"I wish you luck as nothing ever seems to come out of these reviews. I'm not hopeful as I don't have faith in the government."

Getting to Know Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management Groups

- Participants ranged from those who work in organizations that were created before the program began to those whose organizations were created through the program to those who have long wanted to create a group through the program.

- Participants report that program funding is primarily used for core expenses, such as staff and contractors, and to hold two-four fisheries sessions or forums (tier one and tier two) for member communities throughout the year.

- Participants are guided by annual work plans and agreements, as well as multi-year strategic plans, which outline extensive lists of deliverables, objectives, and long-term goals. Some participate only in technical-level meetings, while others are involved in both technical and resource management meetings.

- Multiple sources of funding are leveraged by program participants for staffing, community engagement, reporting, and field activities. This includes funding from the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy, the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative, the province, non-governmental organizations, academia, and other sources. *"Funding is complementary, with Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy technicians from communities working closely with the aquatic resource and oceans management program biologist."*

Staff and Expertise

- In general, groups that participate in the program have some or all of the following staff: executive director or administrator, biologist, fisheries technician, office assistant, data entry/collection clerk, and communications coordinator. Some groups have several biologists and technicians. Often field staff are summer students or part-time jobs.

  - While most groups have biologists, one participant referred to them as "biocrats" as they are no longer focussing on technical activities. *"[The Department] has taken biologists out of the field to attend management meetings."*

Understanding your Services and Service Delivery Potential

- Services common across aquatic resource and oceans management groups include technical 'field' activities, such as: stock assessments, catch monitoring, data collection, watershed management, and environmental assessment. Some groups also deliver one or more of the following services: strategic planning, communications, reporting, coordination of traditional knowledge, policy review and analysis, and capacity-building and education in the community.

- Groups are engaged in both marine and freshwater projects. They also deal with all aquatic species and habitat in their ecosystems, such as salmon, halibut, herring, prawn, crab, urchin, sea cumber, geoduck, tuna, and oolichan.

- Participants report that an increased number of meetings are required in their work plans which takes time away from doing field activities. *"Meetings don't just take one day. You need to prepare for them and then put out reports after."*

  - A few participants are also required by Fisheries and Oceans Canada to fill out specific spreadsheets after they attend meetings, including meeting actions and outcomes. *"They're tracking every single meeting and we're forced to go under 'threat' if we want to keep the jobs and the funding."* One participant no longer has to fill out this sheet, while another said they only use it as a parameter when it relates to a deliverable in their work plan.

Defining Services: Technical Capacity Needs

- Participants added collaborative management, capacity building, and traditional knowledge to the range of services in which they have technical capacity needs.

  - To increase collaborative management capacity, participants thought a regionally run guardian program and more watershed management groups were needed.

  - Participants also strongly support capacity building through youth programs which encourage interest in science. A few groups are already engaging youth through school programs and summer camps, and they would like to run other outreach activities which included both First Nations and non-Aboriginal youth.

- Participants would like to increase their capacity to do more science and data collection to inform integrated resource management and to better understand cumulative effects. This includes research and data collection on recreational fishing, habitat, forestry, fish farms, and other activities that may impact Indigenous fisheries. *"We need transparency and consistency in data collection, and to fix data gaps."*

  - A few participants would like to be doing higher-level science and data studies related to stock assessments, species surveys, genetic testing, and modelling. *"[The Department] is moving to complex modelling and we would like the capacity to critique and offer alternatives."*

  - One participant would like to build capacity to do more terrestrial-marine interface research and socio-economic impact studies. *"Cost-benefit analysis is a very primitive tool to determine the impacts on communities. You can't quantify social impacts and food, social and ceremonial fish is insufficient for community needs."* Another would like to increase their data management capacity with new software.

- Participants are unanimous that more biologists and field technicians are needed to do the work. *"We need more fish squeezers, not more biocrats."* There is also support for guardians, policy analysts, lab technicians and communications support. *"We need a First Nations monitor in each community to watch logging and work near rivers, as well as fisheries activities."*

- Participants also see a need for Fisheries and Oceans Canada to build their capacity; especially, in the habitat branch, and to prepare succession plans. *"Cutbacks at [the Department] need to be addressed. They've also been removed from the field."* The high turnover of staff was noted as a key issue.

Service Delivery Funding: Needs and Options

"Our budget is extremely small. We have to curb a lot of our work."

- Participants want multi-year, predictable funding for all aquatic resource and oceans management groups. Many outlined the salary needs for biologists and other technical staff. One participant also listed an estimated budget for a regional guardian program and a stronger habitat protection program.

    - Participants also want to make sure that funding is retained for both the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy and aquatic resource and oceans management program.

- Participants were clear that staff salaries need to be adjusted to reflect current standards. They also want to make sure that Elders and other First Nations members are paid for their knowledge and participation in departmental processes, including honoraria and travel costs.

Understanding Relationships

"The silos are who we work with at [the Department]. It's so hard to talk with science."

- Participants interact with many staff at Fisheries and Oceans Canada; most often, with Aboriginal affairs advisors, species coordinators, stock assessment leads. They have no interaction with habitat management or aquaculture staff, and very little interaction with scientists at the Pacific Biological Station.

- Participants are working to build relationships with departmental staff to establish trust and open communication. This has been a struggle with high staff turn-over and inconsistency as to which staff attend meetings. *"We build relationships at face-to-face meetings. Each group is so different; you need to sit down with us."*

- Participants meet at Pacific Salmon Commission and integrated fisheries management planning tables, various advisory boards, sub-committees, forums and many other technical tables. They report having strong relationships with other First Nations fisheries organizations, including the First Nations Fisheries Council and other aquatic resource and oceans management groups.

    - Participants also have working relationships with other federal, provincial, and local agencies, as well as industry, academia and non-governmental organizations, such as Parks Canada, Ministry of Transport, BC Hydro, and the University of Victoria.

Participation in Decision-Making Processes

"It's very frustrating raising the same issues year after year with no action in response."

- Participants would like to see their work reflected in regional management and long-term sustainability plans, such as the wild salmon policy. *"There should be*

transparency and 'proof of use' by the Department of First Nations science and data collection." But they do not often see their input reflected in such documents. *"The only time they take our advice is if it's very easy to change."* A few participants do not send information from some of their projects because they know the department *"is not going to do anything with it."*

- One participant thought this might be changing because after 15 years of trying to get action on a fish species, they finally have a pilot project this year. Another shared how they brought interviews and stock assessment information to the department, which resulted in funding for a ditson to do more data collection.

"It's all based on when [the Department] wants to fund something, rather than what Nations know should be done."

Indigenous Knowledge and Input

"It's so difficult to translate Indigenous knowledge so western science can understand it."

- Participants are frustrated that traditional knowledge is not generally accepted by the Department. *"They put 'anecdotal' on everything we say. It's not anecdotal, it's fact."*

- Participants want to see traditional knowledge respected by the Department and reflected in decision making. They suggested that cultural or other training may be needed to help staff understand Indigenous knowledge systems.

  - Several participants stressed the importance of having clear parameters for how traditional knowledge should be used to address the concerns raised by some communities. *"There must be a consistently run knowledge-transfer program with privacy licensing around it to protect names and to ensure that the knowledge is not used for purposes not originally intended."* Another suggested using existing First Nations sharing protocols.

Making Program Improvements

"This program should be fair and equal for all Nations: that's the biggest thing I want to get out of this Program Review."

- Participants shared some insight as to where program had gone wrong in the past and where it still needed improvements. For example:

  - The money received through the program arrives too late in the year. Several participants noted during the workshop that they had yet to receive their funding.

  - The program has not been adequately funded over the years which has impacted salary expectations and technical capacity requirements. *"It's insane the amount of work and expectations that we will respond and participate in freshwater and marine meetings and we have no funding. They're putting more expectations on programs that are already over-subscribed."*

- The lack of timely funding creates multiple issues, including dependency on credit lines and staff retention issues. *"This is biggest concern for our programs: the constant threat of not being able to pay our staff. We lose good people because we don't receive consistent payments. This impacts job security."*

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- More than one participant shared how their funding delays were due to departmental oversight. *"Last year, my agreement sat for one month at the Department because someone 'forgot' it was on their desk. Forgetting isn't an excuse when people's livelihoods are at stake."*

- Participants think the department should use fair and standard processes and reporting requirements as meeting reports are required by some and not others, and templates are always changing. *"I think there's pressure at [the Department] to find something to support their jobs. Every few years we have to change the wording. We still do the same thing every year."*

  - The department is also inconsistent when it comes to annual work plan negotiations and funding for groups to attend departmental meeting. For example, some groups receive honoraria and travel costs, while others do not.

  - Some First Nations have also been excluded from the program. *"We're told to access another [aquatic resource and oceans management] group even though we have a distinct territory."*

- Participants would also like to see fairness for funding across watersheds and ecosystems. *"The Department is focussed on Fraser River salmon: a lot of emphasis and funding goes there and not outside the ecosystem. How do we take that model and organize ourselves? We want fish in our rivers to come back so we don't have to fish on the Fraser. I'm sure they'd like that, too."*

  - One participants reported that indicator streams and rivers are considered 'hot' by the Department and not worth monitoring. *"We desperately need a biologist on our team to prove the Department that these streams are worthwhile."*

  - Another participant was told that whoever gets to the table first gets the funding. *"First come, first serve doesn't seem right."*

- Staff turn-over at the Department is increasing the workload of groups. "*We get comments on our reporting which is often due to the corporate memory gap at the Department. We are constantly teaching new staff and it causes all sorts of delays."*

  - Participants thought Secondments and/or executive swaps between staff at the department and aquatic resource and oceans management groups could improve relationships. This includes science exchanges. *"Operationalizing reconciliation."*

  - But they do not want the Department 'poaching' people who they have mentored and trained over years through programs. *"It's great to get support from government for our youth programs, but don't take them from us at the end."*

Defining Success

"Success is when our group is employing First Nations in every category: biologists, technicians, administrators, communications, and more."

- Participants believe the success of the program will be realized when groups have stable, long-term funding that results in robust science capacity and field presence with strong communications and community engagement.

- Specific priorities include: adequate and stable funding, increased technical capacity, sustainable fisheries, food security and health for seven generations, staff retention, community-driven goals, strengthened relationships and collaboration with the Department, unified First Nations voice, no more data and information gaps, and increased community involvement in employment and activities. *"We want to rebuild our oceans economy taking a holistic approach because everything is connected."*

Measuring Performance

"Has the Department reviewed how they manage Indigenous programs? Do they know their goals?"

- Some participants measure performance based on progress made on priority species and areas, while others base it on meeting the deliverables in their work plans or the short- and long-term objectives set out in their strategic plans.

- Participants are interested in seeing the long-term plans of the Department for the program: *"Where is your work plan and budget to achieve deliverables?"* They would also like to see the recipient capacity assessment tool that is used by the Department to rate their group and would like the opportunity to rate the Department.