NATIONAL INDIGENOUS FISHERIES INSTITUTE
Indigenous Program Review
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Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management Program
Interactive Session
Yellowknife – January 10, 2018

What We Heard

"This is an extremely flexible program that allows each community to address their concerns."

Getting to Know Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management Groups

- All three aquatic resource and oceans management groups in the Northwest Territories are in place to coordinate community concerns. One group is focussed on coordinating and communicating with member communities at the regional level.

- Water quality and quantity are key priorities for these groups, along with contaminants in fish and the cumulative impacts of industry development and climate change on water, aquatic resources, wildlife and the environment as a whole.

Staff and Expertise

"Field work in our communities is done on 'our own dime.' One of our members uses his own boat, pays for his own gas, and spends his own time to do work. We would love to help out with that."

- Groups operate with very small teams: from one to one-and-a-half to two staff for program and technical coordination only.

  - Groups frequently interact with the technical expertise in their member communities; particularly, community-based water quality monitors. In some cases, these technical executives provide direction to the aquatic resource group.

- Some groups combine funding sources, including from the program, to hire seasonal or technical people. *"We have no ability to hire people. We'd like to, but we cannot."* They would like more funding to be able to hire people to take on issues related to the impacts of industry, such as mining. *"It's challenging to call on our monitors to do other work without more money."*

Understanding your Services and Service Delivery Potential

"Community members are trained as local monitors. They're the 'eyes and ears' of the program."

- All three groups run community-based aquatic or environmental monitoring programs. *"We have families working together in our monitoring program: adults provide traditional knowledge and youth handle technological requirements."* One group also has a stewardship program that supports two guardians in each community to collect data on land use and aquatic activity. Guardians in this program discovered both a pipeline burst in their region, as well as a grounded tug and barge.

- All three groups have engaged in stock studies, climate studies, and water-related studies in partnership with academic researchers. Stock studies are generally related to contaminants, such as mercury levels in fish, and other contaminants that result from industry development, including the oil sands.

- Groups are involved in a lot of capacity-building activities that complement the aquatic resource and oceans management program, but which are not directly funded by it. *"By engaging with researchers, we are building technical capacity in the communities."* Many activities are community-driven by the land and environment staff of the community using funds from the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy and other programs.

  - While capacity-building will continue to be a priority, groups would like to expand beyond it. For example, two groups would like to purchase more equipment, such as boats, to be able to participate in more activities. One would also like to do more monitoring of anglers to better protect section 35 rights, while another would like to run a guardian program *"not for charging offences, but to help out fishery officers in the field and collecting data."*

  - There is some interest in doing species at risk projects, but groups think funding from the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk program is insufficient to do so. There is also some interest in becoming involved in emergency response. For example, one group would like to develop emergency response plans for their communities.

- One group offers training courses which mitigate liability issues for communities and individuals, such as boating safety, firearm safety and First Aid. Another group has started a subsistence questionnaire to find out what their members do with the fish after they catch it. *"Fisheries and Oceans Canada is really interested in this."*

Service Delivery Funding: Needs

"We could use a lot more funding to deal with the big challenges. Our projects are pieced together using different funds."

Understanding Relationships

"We have strong partnerships with researchers. We're lucky to have access to them."

- All three aquatic resource and oceans management groups partner with academic researchers; particularly, to study contaminants in fish and the quality of water. Research on climate change impacts and cumulative impacts is also common across groups. *"We incorporate lab tours into our activities so monitors know what happens with the data they collect."*

  - Research conducted in partnership with these groups have, in some cases, evolved into broad regional studies as well as peer-reviewed science.

- Participants also partner with the Northern Contaminants Program and the Cumulative Impacts Management Program, as well as the National Water Research Institute. One group is involved in *Keepers of the Water*: a collaboration of Indigenous peoples, environmental groups and others interested in protecting the air, water and land of the Arctic Drainage Basin. Others are starting to partner with non-governmental groups.

Participation in Decision-Making Processes

"We're trying to work with the natural order of things. We'd like to see the environment have a chance."

- Data collected by community monitors and others involved in aquatic resource and oceans management groups is used by First Nations and Métis decision-makers, such as Chiefs and Council. _"We're more concerned about our data being used by our Nations. It's not 'open source' data and we want it on an internal database for communities to use and access."_

Indigenous Knowledge and Input

"We have young people who are more and more educated. They can help us with this shift from traditional to western knowledge – and we can have both."

- When it comes to receiving the results of studies, groups report mixed experiences. In some cases, groups have had trouble getting the results back. In other cases, they have full access to the data and results.

- Traditional knowledge is built into activities. For example, data collected by community monitors contributes to water and habitat studies. One group is presently building its traditional knowledge database. _"We've been holding workshops involving Elders, youth and leaders to collect data which will be stored in the database. We're just in the early stages – it's a big job."_

Making Program Improvements

"Improving collaboration at all levels of government would definitely improve the program."

- Participants feel the parameters of the program are too narrow; focussing primarily on fish, as opposed to broader aquatic and freshwater issues, such as water concerns, habitat, cumulative effects and climate change progression. They also see a need for more baseline research to be completed in smaller lakes and waterways. _"Most monitors are river monitors, not lake monitors. We don't know much about the fish populations there."_

- Participants also have consistent views about how the program could be improved:

  - Program funding needs to reflect inflation and the costs of travel and activities conducted in the North. _"There's no consideration about the difference in costs to us to do meetings and consultations in different seasons."_ At the same time, groups need more funding to meet the expectations of Fisheries and Oceans Canada to take on additional services, such as participation in integrated fisheries management planning.

  - Program reporting is too lengthy and it impacts the flow of funds. _"It's a challenge for funding and reimbursements and our funding is always getting held up."_ More than one participant spoke about the challenges managing cash flows with delays in receiving funding through the program.

Defining Success

"We're all working towards a common goal: communities, Elders, and governments."

- Groups define success as access to consistent and adequate funding, year over year, with no reporting requirements. They also want to see more education of youth and others about the importance of the aquatic resource program and its priorities.

Measuring Performance

- Groups use an annual work plan to guide their activities because it is required as part of their funding agreement. _"It never addresses what we really want because of lack of funding."_ Work plans are fulfilled each year and performance is measured against these activities.