

What We Heard

“It’s our right. If it was their right, they would do exactly the same thing.”

Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

- Community members fish multiple species, including salmon, bass, trout, lobster, shad, clams, scallops and oysters. However, the species that may be fished for food may differ by community. For example, one participant’s community only has two species for consumption; while another has multiple species.
- Participants have fishery departments to administer the program. In one community, every member gets a tag for a percentage of the community’s food fish quota and fishery guardians manage tag distribution and the fishery count.
- Participants employ fishery workers using both program funds and own source revenues. The number of employees in communities varies widely: one has six seasonal employees who work 26 weeks and 11 fishery guardians who work 14-16 weeks, while another has only one full-time employee, two seasonal employees, and no fishery guardians.

Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

“We don’t like to sign the agreement, but we do so yearly.”

- Participants regularly meet with the Department about their food fisheries even though there are issues. *“We always argue about our food fishery.”*
 - One community has been working to get species that were introduced into their territory, added to their agreement. *“Maybe this isn’t a traditional food, but it’s here and we have vessels and a processing plant to invest and distribute it as food to our members.”*
 - Another has been working to get more funding for monitoring and research in exchange for the Department’s request to increase the size of lobster caught for food. *“We told them, if you want this proposal, we will need more money for patrols and stations so you get accurate monitoring reports.”*
- Participants also attend Tier 3 meetings with the Department and recreational and commercial fish harvesters when fisheries management proposals are discussed that could impact food fish, such as Atlantic salmon. *“We have a seat in meetings about the status of species – it’s not about whether it’s commercial or ceremonial, it’s whether the species is healthy or not.”*

Ceremonial

- First Nations in New Brunswick have annual pow-wows, including a Fishermen pow-wow “Giver on the river” that is organized by the Assembly of First Nations. These

ceremonies include feasts of traditional food, including fish. One community has a catch of 5,000 lbs. for its pow-wow.

Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

“There is little community involvement due to the lack of funds.”

- Participants do data collection and stock assessments on select species. For example, one community does data collection, stock assessments and tag research on salmon, while the other conducts creel surveys on bass and data collection, stock assessments, and other research on eels. *“We keep track of the numbers, weights and any diseases.”* Fishery guardians also do catch and fishery monitoring and, in a limited way, enforce fishing rules.
 - One community is involved in watershed habitat restoration activities with the province. They would like these types of activities to be included in their Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreement, as they feel the program is shifting into two with the watershed protection program.
 - Another is involved in habitat activities related to river flooding clean-up and would like their agreement to extend more employment and training for these types of activities.
- Participants do not think technical activities funded under the agreement are meeting their community’s needs, with the exception of catch and fishery monitoring. They want more funds under their agreement to better complete these activities.
 - One community would also like more authority to be given to fishery guardians to enforce fishing rules.

Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements

“We want recognition of our right to sell food fish.”

- One community’s fishing boats go to a weigh station and if the weight of their catch is over their quota, it goes to membership.

Understanding Relationships

“Communication is a key component of our relationship with resource management.”

- Participants interact with the Department’s program administrators, science, resource management, and local conservation and protection detachment through First Nation liaison personnel. One community is also in a working group to address issues between the Department and their First Nation.
 - One community reported not having a good relationship with conservation and protection.
- Participants would like more respectful relationships. For example, they do not get a ‘thank you’ or hear back from the Department when they share scientific data or

make a request to participate in scientific studies. *“They seem to think they have a higher authority than everyone else.”*

- Participants also want more respectful relationships with universities and other levels of government seeking to do research and restoration projects related to their territories and species. *“We weren’t notified of the habitat project until they wanted a letter of support. We should have been one of the first to be notified and to be invited to collaborate.”*

“Meaningful dialogue is always talked about, but what does that really mean to us?”

Co-management

“On a scale of 1-10, I give them a 5 in terms of collaboration and co-management.”

- Participants are hopeful that co-management in the future will end the ‘us vs. them’ outlook that exists today. However, they are clear that there are a lot of issues to be addressed before the Department and communities can reach co-management. *“When each story is told from the Indigenous, resource user, and departmental sides – then we can begin to move forward.”*
- One participant is concerned about the lack of community consultation on the species at risk report on Atlantic salmon that resulted in the fish being classified as a species of concern. *“Salmon is an important part of our culture and our food fishery, yet we did not contribute to the study.”*

Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

- Participants want more funding to be administered through the program to pay for wages, technical activities, and aging vehicles and equipment. There is also support for more funding for science at the community level – not just to aquatic resource and oceans management groups.
 - One community has aspirations for an in-depth science program for research including an in-house lab and a biologist.
- Participants want recognition of the right to sell food fish. One community also wants management and control of the program to be decentralized from Ottawa to the local department office and, eventually, the First Nation itself. Another wants fair distribution of food fish in agreements from Nation to Nation. *“We all have the same right – it’s not a privilege, it’s a right – and the Department must address this disparity.”*
- Participants support increased collaboration between levels of government; especially, as the province has jurisdiction of industries, such as forestry, which impact fish and fish habitat. They also want more funding to be used by government (not through the program) to educate Canadians about section 35.1 rights and to educate students about the importance of the ecosystem to fish and other resources.

Improving Program Administration

- Participants do not like monthly reporting requirements, the new reporting templates, or the changed reporting schedule. *“It’s changed so much and we have to learn it ourselves.”* They recall in the past there were only two reports. One community would also like to have input into these templates before they are put into use.
- One participant said they do not sign their agreement until August even though the fishery begins before that time.

Training and Skills Development

“All aspects of training would benefit our fisheries department.”

- Participants support more training and capacity building for program administrators, fisheries managers, field technicians, and fishery guardians. This includes training on the *Fisheries Act* and related regulations and policies so they can better understand the rules of the fishery. *“The program administrator does not tell us that much.”* It also includes training, skills development and capacity-building in science and water-related research.

Measuring Success

“One day, I would like to be able to go fishing with my kids and not be harassed, and be able to take home what we catch to eat. To do what we did traditionally.”

- Success is measured by more recognition for Treaty rights to fish all species, to be part of the decision-making in treaty rights related to fishing and habitat, and to expand more opportunities, jobs, and resources.
- Success is also measured by providing meaningful jobs in the community and meeting other community needs.

Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

“This could open the door to closer relationships if we are more involved.”

- Participants with fishery guardians have designated guardians to monitor fishing activity and enforce fishing rules. Participants without fishery guardians in their community’s program received funding to train two guardians, *“but when they returned from training, there were no jobs for them.”*
- Participants would like follow up on a report that recognized the Department is short-handed in terms of enforcement and that there are others they can use, such as guardians. *“They clearly said that the fishery guardian program could help with poaching on the rivers.”*