

What We Heard

Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

“Our priority is to have enough fish and shellfish to meet our community’s needs.”

- First Nations communities in Nova Scotia are involved in Kwilmu’kw Maw-klusuaqn (Mi’kmaq Rights Initiative) which is seeking consensus on the best ways to implement Aboriginal and treaty rights for now and seven future generations.
 - Kwilmu’kw Maw-klusuaqn is also striving to develop systems of Mi’kmaq governance and resource management and to obtain the basis for a shared economy and social development (among other priorities). Species at risk is one component of this initiative, with 14 fish and aquatic mammal species on the list.
- The participants’ community has six fishery workers employed year round, but salaries are largely funded by the Band. *“I’m certain other communities would love to have year-round workers, but lack of funding through the program means the majority work long enough to get employment insurance.”*
 - Three fishery guardians annually negotiate the community’s agreement and engage in education activities to explain the program and the conditions of fishing under the agreement to community members. Guardians also manage the fishery by distributing tags and participate in fisheries management research projects.

Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

“We need to be able to support the community’s food, social and ceremonial needs in new and innovative ways because of climate change and invasive species.”

- Participants want to negotiate more food fish into their agreements to offset declining stocks in local lakes and rivers. *“If the Mi’kmaw only ate fish in their diets, we would fish out our lakes.”* Some communities in the region are interested in many other species, while others already have multiple species in their agreements.
 - The community is also interested in pursuing aquaculture to revive traditional oysters that were destroyed by parasites. They presently have a small oyster enhancement hatchery to produce oysters for food.

Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

“We constantly need to justify activities that are linked to food, social and ceremonial fishing and the priorities of our community.”

- Participants do data collection, habitat restoration, fisheries enhancement, catch and fishery monitoring, and other technical activities. This includes stream restoration projects and monitoring of water temperature, salinity, and runoff onto spawning

grounds and habitat. The work is primarily done by fishery guardians and biologists, but it may not all be funded through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program.

- Participants report that data collection is not meeting community needs and they want improved reporting and better data storage. They have experienced difficulty in recent years collecting data on cod with declining stocks. *“Over the last two years, we only caught 12 cod.”*
- Participants want habitat restoration, fisheries enhancement and other activities to be in agreements and funding for training to do these activities. The community has leveraged other funds to do this work in the past, which can be a challenge.
- The community has a biologist, but she spends a lot of time writing proposals, rather than doing sampling and other fieldwork. They would like more involvement in stock assessments of species, but need funding to be able to participate. They also want access to data reports and integration of Mi’kmaq ecological knowledge in studies.
- Participants are concerned about the impacts of other industries on fish and fish habitat, such as forestry, as well as some vessel/gear types, such as bottom trawlers. They want to work on ecosystem management plans through the program to address these impacts and species at risk.

Co-management

- Participants support more funding for communities to be able to participate in meetings and federal processes related to the ecosystem approach to fisheries management.

Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements

- Participants want ‘moderate livelihood’ to be defined and implemented. They would also like to explore using the commercial fishery to secure food fish without having to purchase additional vessels and equipment. For example, if 10,000 lbs. of fish are commercially caught, 3,000 lbs. could be distributed first as food.

Understanding Relationships

- Participants are more interested in meeting with regional departmental staff than the local area office when discussing the program and food, social and ceremonial fishing conditions *“because they have more direct access to decision-makers.”*
- Participants have various relationships with the Department:
 - They work with program administrators to develop their annual plan, but they *“don’t have input into the Department’s plan”* They also have a good relationship with science; although this relationship depends on who is involved. *“We also don’t have input into their priorities or sampling plans.”*
 - They have a ‘spotty’ relationship with resource management. *“There is a good working relationship with the local area office, but the work is not necessarily related to the program.”* They also report very little contact or relationship with Conservation and Protection. *“Guardians report issues to conservation and protection, but they often do not hear back.”*

- Participants have built relationships with the Province and other First Nation communities. They ‘bumped heads’ with the Province a few years about when ministry regulations related to licence and lease renewals created a financial barrier for the community. *“It was \$1,500 to look at the application and \$1,000 to do the application, so we made it clear that we would not pay this fee.”*

Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

“We don’t want to see any increased program dollars going into the Department’s administration of the program. It needs to go to the communities.”

- Participants support the development of a community-based, ecosystem management plan within the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program to protect water resources and prevent impacts to food, social and ceremonial species and community infrastructure. *“All fisheries should be done in an ecologically sustainable way that considers conservation of the species.”*
- Participants would like to see restrictions removed on harvest locations and the species that are allowed to be harvested, so they have enough fish and shellfish to meet community needs. They also want access to internal ‘side tables’ to be able to address First Nations concerns with federal policy regulations.
- Overall, participants would like the program to have more funding to be able to fund existing activities and to take on other activities.

Training and Skills Development

“We need more human and financial resources to conduct the program.”

- Participants support capacity building at all levels – program administration, fisheries management, field technician, fishery guardian and biologist. They also see value in leveraging and applying for other funding to ensure staff work year-round and to properly implement the program.

Measuring Success

- Success is measured by ‘freezers filled with food’ and having more species in the community’s harvest agreement.

Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

“Fishery guardians are the ones people approach to address forestry issues, nuisance animals, and other issues that typically do not fall under our agreement.”

- When the guardian program started, participants thought guardians would eventually become fishery officers. They did not expect that guardians would be doing technical work, such as monitoring fish tags and the fishery. *“Now guardians wouldn’t want to be fishery officers.”*
- Participants support the development of other programs similar in scope to the fishery guardian program so the guardians can manage forestry and the harvest of moose and deer with additional resources: human, financial and training.