

Reconcile Resource Management by Reflecting Indigenous Rights in Fisheries and Oceans Programs, Practises and Policies

Recommendations to improve federal fisheries and oceans programs released today by the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute

Membertou, Nova Scotia, May 22, 2019 – The second and final report on the review of Indigenous programs at Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) calls on the Department to reconcile the management of fish, habitat and other aquatic resources with Indigenous communities to achieve the intent of programs put in place almost three decades ago.

“The Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy was always meant to enable resource co-management – to build and retain the capacity to meaningfully participate in the management of fisheries,” said John G. Paul, Executive Director of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat and Chair of the Institute’s Board of Directors. “It’s time to deliver on that promise so we can ensure that fish are around to meet the needs of future generations.”

The Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy was one of two programs reviewed during phase two of Indigenous Program Review. The Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program was the second. Both began in 1992 to help DFO manage the fishery in a manner that respected the section 35.1 priority rights of First Nations to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

“The priority rights of Indigenous peoples must be better reflected in the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy and other DFO programs, practises and policies,” said Ken Paul, Director of Fisheries at the Assembly of First Nations and an Institute Board Director. “This is key to the success of future programming and Indigenous–DFO collaborations.”

Recommendations made in the phase two report build on those made in phase one. This includes by identifying practical steps for the Department to take to support capacity-building and to realign programs to achieve Indigenous-set objectives. The report also makes a number of recommendations which require a cultural change to happen at the Department, such as recognizing that Indigenous fishery guardians are better placed to enforce the rules of the fishery in their territories.

“It’s time for DFO to fully embrace the value of enforcement collaboration with Indigenous Nations,” said Jordan Point, Executive Director of the First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia, Institute Board Director, and former fishery officer and fishery guardian. “This means recognizing the jurisdiction and authority of Nations in their territories – and being part of the collegial relationship envisioned for the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program.”

Recommendations in phase two are based on the input of more than 330 program participants from over 150 communities who were engaged in one of 36 engagement sessions held by the Institute between April 2018 and January 2019.

The Institute also held engagement sessions with more than 140 potential participants from communities across the North to inform the development of the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative. These sessions took place alongside Indigenous program review between September 2017 and October 2018.

“What we learned and heard is that communities in the North need a flexible, multi-type program,” said Jeffrey Maurice, Director of Policy and Planning at Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and Board Director. “For some, this means a program similar to the one in the east and the west. For others, it means introducing a model of economic development programming that values community fishing for food security and sovereignty, as well as local market saturation.”

“Governments and all Canadians need to understand the importance of the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative to the economic success of northern regions,” added the Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew, P.C., resident of the Sahtu Region in the Northwest Territories and Board Director. “In many areas of the North, commercial fishing is one of the few – if not the only – economic driver for our communities. It’s also key to addressing high unemployment rates and food insecurity.”

Indigenous program review is the result of a collaborative, technical approach being taken by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute to achieve a shared vision for future programs – and to address challenges together. Within this co-development, co-design, co-delivery approach, Indigenous experts and government officials work together to identify best practises and mutually acceptable solutions by examining the operations behind programs, and the practises behind program delivery, while respecting the views and aspirations of Indigenous communities.

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To download the reports: <http://indigenousfisheries.ca/en/resources/>

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The National Indigenous Fisheries Institute promotes national consistency and standards across Indigenous programs to maximize benefits to communities.