

## What We Heard

*“We all have issues and we’re working individually to resolve them. Maybe we need to get together and unite to accomplish them.”*

- Participants wanted more time to be able to expand on the worksheets used during the workshop and to engage other community members in the exercises.

## Getting to Know Communities, their Fisheries and their Fishery Guardians

- Participants included communities with and without food, social and ceremonial fisheries. One has an extensive technical program for science activities, data collection, habitat monitoring and restoration and other field activities. Another has a comprehensive fishery guardian program with seven designated guardians, which are also cross-designated by the Province to protect land and freshwater wildlife.
  - The majority of participants use the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program to fund activities related to their community’s commercial fisheries as well as their food, social and ceremonial fisheries. Some want separate agreements through the program to address the needs of each fishery, while others prefer having one agreement for both.
  - Some communities without food fisheries have asked the Department for access to certain species as food fisheries, such as lobster. *“There are more and more requests from community members for access to fish to help them meet their food needs.”*
- Participants fish multiple species, which may include cod, halibut, clams, whelk, snow crab, lobster, turbot, salmon, rock cod, shrimp, scallops, char, mussels, and sea urchin. One community also hunts seals, walrus, beluga, and bowhead. Community and commercial fisheries follow the same rules including permitted fishing zones, which is an area of concern for several participants. *“In the past we fished all over. Nomadic people historically want to fish outside the areas established by the Department.”* Some communities have separate agreements with the Province to be able to fish salmon in freshwater sources.
  - A few participants said fines have been issued to members when they have fished outside of permitted zones or broken other rules of the fishery. A few think their harvesters are targeted by Conservation and Protection. *“Fishery officers frequently intercept our harvesters and they feel threatened and targeted.”*
- Participants have extensive food distribution programs; some at significant cost to the community, as distribution includes members who live off-reserve and members without a reserve. *“We distribute a box to every household – it’s symbolic.”* One community has an agreement with the Province to distribute salmon. Another has community freezers to supply fish and game to their members throughout the year. Distributed fish are recorded.
  - Distribution programs prioritize Elders in the community. Many communities also distribute to day cares and provide fish for pow-wows, family celebrations, and other community events.
  - Participants without food fisheries distribute fish to members from commercial quotas.

### Technical Activities

*“Data collection has to be both ways. If you don’t share your data, how can you tell us that we’re overfishing?”*

- Participants are primarily involved in the collection of data related to their food fishery. They also administer their community’s fishery, designate fish harvesters and/or captains of community boats, and explain the rules of the fishery to community members.
  - Several participants report that members in their communities do not like completing catch reports. While a few are interested in using the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program to improve data collection and catch and fishery monitoring, others question the value of data collection for the community and whether it is being used for more access or restrictions to fisheries. *“The Department wants us to collect data for them – it’s not for us.”* Still others view data collection as a way to update the species list in their agreement. *“If you declare the quantity of what you fish, they will become part of the species on your list.”*
  - A few thought the Department should share their data with communities. *“We should be able to see the data after the Department works with it to determine if it is accurate.”*
- A few communities are involved in fish enhancement, habitat restoration and stock assessments, but these activities are not necessarily part of their Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreement. For example, some participate in these activities through their aquatic resource and oceans management group. Others pay for these activities using own source revenues.
  - Several want the Department to support habitat restoration activities through other programs and agreements, such as the Oceans Protection Plan.
- Participants are concerned about the conservation of fish species. *“We need to save fisheries the same way we have preserved art for centuries.”* The one community with fishery guardians has an education component to their program to conserve species. *“It’s key to get the education piece out.”*
  - Many participants see a need for education activities to be brought into communities so they understand the rules of each fishery and how to protect fish species. *“We need to raise awareness about the rules of the fishery. We have some pamphlets, but we need posters and other activities.”*

### Food, Social and Ceremonial Fisheries

- Participants have differing views about whether food fisheries should have area, season, or other restrictions. Some support using traditional territories as zones, for example, while others do not think this would work for overlapping territories or communities without defined territories.
  - There is some support for communities to have the flexibility to decide whether they fish commercially or communally on specific fisheries. *“We have to go between 48 and 72 hours after the commercial fisheries – we should be able to fish our amount regardless of the timeframe.”* Another thinks the Department’s regulations should be updated to more clearly reflect that the food fishery has priority over other fisheries. *“We should be able to fish what we want for food.”*

### Commercial Fisheries

- Participants are actively involved in commercial fisheries. A few pointed to the benefits of commercial fishing to the community. *“Our revenues are creating jobs for the community – money trickles in to benefit us in many ways.”* One has also been engaged in discussions with the Department to be make better use of their commercial fishery to benefit the community. *“Regulations imposed on us right now prevent this.”*
  - Many need more equipment to be able to participate in commercial fisheries, including vessels and gear. One would also like a wharf to be able to offload their catches.

### Co-management and Rights Issues

*“Are designations of residents to fish for food infringing on the rights of those who live off-reserve?”*

- Some participants think the program needs more flexibility so communities are able to independently manage their fisheries. *“The program was created to help us with co-management, but we’re always being told we can’t do this and we can’t do that.”*
  - One would like to be able to count bycatches in their food quota rather than having to discard these fish when it is caught during commercial activities. *“Even though we’re not using required gear, let us manage our own by-catch. We already have people on the wharf who can verify the catch.”* This participant thought an adjustment could be made to existing regulations to allow food fisheries to exercise this type of flexible management.
  - Another already has a self-management regime with rangers to enforce their community’s laws for their salmon fishery.
- Many participants see the need for clarity when it comes to the rights of Indigenous people to fish. *“Is it a right or a communal right?”* For example, one community’s members are reluctant to agree to individual designations to fish because they feel that they have a right to fish for their food needs and do not need a designation. Others do not know how to respond to requests from off-reserve members to fish in various areas as part of their subsistence rights. *“There’s no regulations on this topic.”*
  - One community’s Chief and Council decides on a case-by-case basis whether non-residents may fish. Another is trying to establish a non-residency fishing code to address the issue.
  - One asked why communal fishing rights did not have regulations similar to hunting to outline the rights. *“It’s a technical program – we have to fish within the limits, but it has nothing to do with our territorial claim.”*

### Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

- Only one community has designated fishery guardians, and they would like to double the number so there is one fishery guardian for each of their communities. Another has rangers performing fishery monitoring duties, which are funded through the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian program, but they are not interested in the rangers becoming fishery guardians because it would limit their enforcement authority. Still another community has territorial officers who monitor their fisheries.

- Several participants are interested in participating in the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian program in the future, including an aquatic resource and oceans management group. One sees the guardian program as a potential solution to reopen salmon fishing for their community. Another views the guardian program as a way to better prevent individuals from fishing on their own.
- Fishery guardians in the one community are funded through the Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management Program. They are part of a larger team of wardens who are designated by the Province to monitor land and freshwater wildlife.
  - This community has short- and long-term goals for their guardian/warden team. First, they want more funding to be able to provide these employees with year-round full-time employment, as work hours are cut in half during the winter months. *“It may take four hours to get to a monitoring location and, yet, in winter, we can only employ guardians for three hours a day.”* Second, they want funding to be able to train guardians. *“We get training funds from someone else for our guardians.”* Third, they want to be able to pay guardians equitable wages. *“We provide cheap labour and it’s being exploited.”* Fourth, they want to build the education component of the program. Over the long term, they also want to have their own officers enforcing the rules of the fishery. *“We have limited powers today, but we want full powers in the future.”*
  - This community also thinks full-time employment will address the high turn-around rate, which means annual costs for new training.

### **Understanding Relationships**

*“One of our challenges is that there are two different world views – Indigenous knowledge and western science. The Department has difficulty recognizing this and integrating it into our agreement.”*

- Participants think more work needs to be done at the Department to build trust in Indigenous communities and their ability to manage fisheries.
  - A few think reporting is too detailed and reflects the lack of trust in communities by the Department.
  - Others view Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreements as a way to build this trust if the agreements enabled more flexibility. *“It’s not just the money; it’s letting us manage our agreement ourselves.”* One noted that their community’s agreement with the Province had this flexibility.

### **Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program**

*“Not everything is bad about the program, but it needs to be tweaked.”*

- Participants want the program to be updated to reflect the rate of inflation in terms of funding, changing demographics in Indigenous communities, and the differing needs of various communities. There is also support for the list of food fisheries to be updated more frequently to adjust both the quantity and types of species allowable in their fisheries. *“If we can demonstrate each and every year that we’re using this fish and distributing it, then the list should be adjusted.”*

- In particular, participants want the program to provide sufficient funds to communities so they can fulfil their agreements. *“Right now, we have to use funds from our own revenues to pay for our activities.”* There is also support for the program to fund more education and awareness related to the fishery. *“Before we even begin a food fishery, we need education in the community about the different fisheries.”*
  - Several participants want the Department to acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the program. *“Find a way to rework the program so that it protects our knowledge as Indigenous peoples.”*
  - Others want more autonomy in how the program funds are spent. *“We want a framework that can be adapted to different communities.”*
- Several participants want the program’s objectives to be able to meet the needs of different community dynamics. *“The objectives don’t feel community-based right now.”* One also thinks the program needs to establish a vision.
  - One participant stressed the need to actually see changes through this program review. *“We do a lot of consultations, round tables and exercises on how to fix things but never see any changes. We MUST see changes.”*
- Some participants also want the program to require less reporting by communities (or at least fewer details to be required in reports).