

What We Heard

Getting to Know Commercial Fisheries

“Great Slave Lake is a big, beautiful lake and our communities settled all around it.”

- Participants want to use the new program as a way to establish their own fisheries, which they can run and maintain for the benefit of community members. *“We want the fisheries industry to sustain us – we want our own First Nations fisheries.”*
- They also want the Department to get rid of the Great Slave Lake Advisory Committee because it does not work for First Nations. *“First Nations need some entity like GSLAC, but for First Nations only and in partnership.”*

Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiatives in the Atlantic and Pacific

“Food is the number one priority for us and we don’t want commercial fisheries to impact our food supply. So first, we need to address management and the rights.”

- Participants think the programs that have worked in the Atlantic and Pacific can work in the Northwest Territories, but they want to ensure first that communities have the right to fish for subsistence purposes before fisheries are commercialized.
 - To meet this requirement, participants want scientific data on fish stocks to first be collected before a decision is made about any commercial activities. *“We need to understand the biomass first to see what the lake can carry commercially.”* They also want to have discussions at the community level regarding licensing, allocation and quota.
- Participants also expect that the new program will have strategies to address the cost of travel and distribution before commercial activities are pursued.

Developing the Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative

Participants felt that the session’s worksheets were premature for their communities. However, some did work through a few of the exercises and this input is reflected below.

Business Planning

- Participants identified some of their business planning and capacity needs as equipment, infrastructure, baseline data, funding, qualified personnel, and training in all areas. *“We need locally based fisheries operated by First Nations and involving community members.”*

Ideal Business Development Team

- When considering the ideal business development team, participants saw the need for fisheries and financial expertise, as well as inclusion of Indigenous and/or community members. One also thought the team should have business, training and human resources expertise. *“We need consultants with experience to give us advice on governance and legal structures. We also need to work with Elders and users to see what they want so our strategic planning will help us reach long-term goals.”*

Enterprise Scale, Strategic Planning, and Business Development Team Support

“This kind of work would be good for our people because they like to be up early and outside working.”

- Participants see economic fisheries at the artisanal stage today, evolving to mid-scale commercial in 10 years, and perhaps becoming large-scale in the future. To realize this vision, they would like a database study to evaluate fisheries enterprises, infrastructure, and capacity-building among other business development team support services.

Industry Know-how and Markets

- Participants see potential economic opportunities for Great Slave Lake fisheries if communities are supported with infrastructure, partnerships, local fish and ice plants, catch transportation, funding, and support for people willing to be part of commercial start-ups.

Infrastructure Needs

“Create economic benefits and opportunities for people in our communities, including local jobs.”

- Participants think their unique needs need to be addressed for the program to work. This includes dealing with transportation costs and having processing plants closer to fish harvesters.

Conclusions and Next Steps

“We want to dance, but it just depends on the type of music.”

- Participants noted some pre-conditions prior to engaging on the program again: talking to their community members, assessing capacity and assets, collecting data to establish the biomass of fish in the Lake, and incorporating this in their Treaty chapter on lands, water and the fishery.