

What We Heard

Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

- Participants represent eight member communities on areas of common concern, including fisheries, habitat and aquatic resource management issues.
 - This alliance of Nations has worked hard over the past two decades to restore salmon in their territory. This includes by undertaking restoration and salmon reintroduction initiatives in lakes and rivers, rebuilding fish habitat, and administering their own hatchery. *“The hatchery represents a critical stage of our Nation’s restoration initiative and is part of a long-term program to restore the historical range of sockeye.”*
 - Funding for the reintroduction program originated from public funds in the United States. It is led by the Nation in partnership with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development.
 - Related activities are funded in part by BC Hydro, Habitat Conservation Trust, and Pacific Salmon Foundation.

Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

“We need to talk about how Indigenous communities get back to being able to feed their families.”

- As a result of the reintroduction and restoration program, communities once again have fisheries for food, social and ceremonial purposes. *“In good years, we’ve also had a small-scale commercial fishery.”*
 - Communities issue a ‘call out’ to community members and Elders to get fish when it is available. *“The community has said how much they appreciate it.”*
 - They also gather members together for a salmon feast to honour and respect the fishery, and hold workshops to teach youth how to clean and preserve fish. *“People are talking again about drying fish.”*

Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

“All of our funding is piecemeal. Project-to-project funding does not constitute Indigenous management.”

- Participants first had a program agreement under the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, but negotiated their own agreement in 1997, and have had an agreement every year since. *“The original intent remains the same.”*
 - The agreement funds some chinook and sockeye stock assessments, proposal writing for habitat restoration, engagement meetings related to fish enhancement,

and some catch and fishery monitoring. *“There is one long-term agreement for the fish hatchery.”*

- Communities are also engaged in other technical activities that are not funded through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy. For example, they have education outreach “fish in the classroom” in 13 local schools.
- Participants report that the program’s funding and scale of activities are not meeting the needs of communities.
 - One was unsure how much core funding was used to support positions. *“We have 48 people who work in fisheries and every year, we look for funding to keep them employed.”*
 - Another said program funding was primarily used to write proposals for habitat enhancement, with a small portion allotted for one day of catch monitoring.
- Participants want resources to better manage and utilize data. *“There’s no feedback loop: we’d like to look at the data we collect, give feedback to communities, and get their input on it.”* They also want more program linkages to species at risk priorities for chinook and steelhead, and other natural resource management issues (wildlife and lands), so they may address the ecosystem as a whole. *“Our ecosystems are at high risk and everything is trying to coexist in one spot.”*
 - Water management is among these priorities. *“Right now water management is about taking water, not conserving it. People in our area have lost economic opportunities because water is for farmers to water their fields.”*

Co-management

“One of our strengths is our willingness to collaborate.”

- Participants are interested in specific program funding to build co-management and enforcement capacity in communities, including through training. *“Three Bands are interested in enforcing fishery rules. We have no DFO presence in our area.”*
 - Participants also stress the need for shared decision-making based on data collected and shared with the Department. *“Our information must end up in shared decision-making.”*

Understanding Relationships

“Our relationships have been constant. The Department’s succession planning has kept relationships strong.”

- Participants report having good technical relationships with Fisheries and Oceans Canada. They meet Science three times per year in face-to-face meetings and have regular conference calls throughout the year. They also have some interaction with Conservation and Protection staff who contact communities before they come to areas. *“They are open to have field technical and Band members come along with them.”*
 - Participants do not meet program administrators often however. *“We feel like the on-the-ground staff are protecting us from the bureaucracy.”*

- Participants have strong relationships with many other groups, Bands, non-governmental organizations, and levels of government, including in the United States. *“Initially, there were a lot of barriers to move money across the border, but there are good relationships among Indigenous people on both sides.”*
 - They also have built relationships with recreational fish harvesters. *“Recreational fishermen now feel they have the opportunity to fish because of [our Nation]. When we started there was mistrust, but we worked with the BC Wildlife Federation and other non-native allies that vouched for our work.”*
- Participants want to increase awareness of their abilities to do the work with the Province and broader community. *“They don’t understand what we can do and they can be condescending.”*

Improving the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program

“There has to be some way to bring different chunks of funds together from federal departments. We submit a lot of proposals.”

- Participants listed a number of ways to improve the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program; all of which relate to funding:
 - Renegotiating funding components to consider co-management costs.
 - Collaborating program funding from other federal departments, such as Environment and Climate Change Canada and Parks Canada.
 - Adapting the program to fund ecosystem management, including the impacts of climate change on fisheries habitat and waterways.
 - Funding traditional economic knowledge capacity-building activities. *“We come with project details and ask for specific traditional ecological knowledge for the project. We need constant guidance on how that knowledge may be used.”*
- One would also like to see multi-year agreements. Another wants work exchanges between First Nations and Science at Fisheries and Oceans Canada to be part of the program. *“It would be nice to have a conference for all Bands in the area and Science.”*
- Participants want more capacity-building training to be funded in the program, such as proposal and technical writing, project management, as well as safety training for workers, such as swiftwater, first aid, WHMIS and helicopter training. They also want fishery guardians to be trained and employed in each community.

Measuring Success

- Participants measure the program’s success by the following indicators:
 - consistent returns for food, social and ceremonial fisheries and economic opportunities
 - restored habitat
 - number of employees
 - level of community engagement in the program
 - co-management agreements