

## What We Heard

*“When it comes to the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy, we need to make sure everyone is taken care of and no one is left out because of geographic isolation.”*

### Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

- Participants included members of six Nations<sup>1</sup> and one Tribal Council with seven member Nations. Some Nations have multiple communities.
- Participants run different community fishery programs: some have had programs since the mid-1980’s and employ more than a dozen employees, while others have only recently started a program and have only one or two personnel.
  - Members fish sockeye, chinook, coho, pinks, steelhead, lake char and trout. A few also fish kokanee salmon.
- Participants are concerned about the impacts of other industries, climate change, environmental disasters, enhanced fish, and commercial and recreational fishing on their waterways and fisheries. *“We’re fully aware of the impacts and changes to the ecosystem: salmon stocks are rapidly decreasing.”* A few said members are fishing in other traditional spots due to dwindling stocks. Others notice the timing of returns has changed. One is also concerned about the impact of dwindling stocks on grizzly bears and forestry. *“I don’t think that’s talked about a lot: the ecosystem depends on sockeye for food, too.”*
  - One Nation used to have a fairly large sockeye run, but it was almost depleted when Fisheries and Oceans Canada started targeting the run to rebuild one nearby. *“The last time we had an active sockeye fishery was about 18 years ago.”* Another had a weir in the lake where members fished, but *“the Department made us take it apart.”*
  - Some think recreational fishing prevents sufficient fish from reaching terminal areas. *“There’s a lot of injuries and mortality. Something needs to be done to factor in the impact of recreational fisheries on food fisheries. It’s about priority access.”*
  - Several are concerned about the impact of enhanced returns on wild stocks even if members are eating enhanced fish *“because they are stronger.”* A few noted inter-tribal issues over enhanced fish in the watershed. *“We’re going to have to try to protect fish that come through our waters. There’s going to be real battles. I can see inter-tribal court cases coming out of this.”*

### Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs

*“I think DFO is not really following the law in terms of food fish. If a community needs fish, they need fish – all of this accounting is a real problem.”*

- Participants report that food fisheries are not meeting the needs of communities and several buy food fish from others. *“Some years are better than others.”*

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<sup>1</sup> One participant provided input to this workshop via a telephone interview on October 26, 2018.

- One community has been trying to conserve and rebuild their fishery, while purchasing food fish from commercial fish harvesters or neighbouring Nations. When sockeye numbers declined, they depended on chinook and then, coho, when chinook numbers dwindled. *“This is the first year that we’ve seen coho so bad and we didn’t meet food fish needs with anything. There’s a lot of anger in the community.”* They find commercial harvesters did not live up to purchasing agreements because *“they make more profit commercially”* and wonder if the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program could facilitate such agreements.
- Another community historically traded with nearby Nations for their food fish and has also had agreements to set nets in their waters. *“This year, we traded firewood for fish.”* They are now focused on conservation because fish are ‘mostly gone’ in their territory. *“Children know we have to conserve them. They understand not to touch fish when they get in the creeks.”*
- One participant was expecting to meet their food fish needs this year, but the Department was late completing the paperwork, so the fishery started later than it should and *“we only got about 10-20% in the end.”* Others said their community fishes what they need for food regardless of their allocations. *“We don’t care – we take what we need.”*
- While food fish allocations are out of scope in the technical program review, it was brought up by a few participants:
  - One did not think allocation was a policy issue. *“The whole reason starts with technical issues. DFO sacrificed our run for the sake of another, which is now in an even worse position. Technical numbers were used to determine this action.”*
  - Another is concerned that allocation policies do not take off-reserve populations into consideration. *“A lot of sharing happens to provide for these members.”*

### **Understanding Agreements**

- Almost all participants have an Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreement, including a few who have an agreement through a Tribal Council. One community initially had an agreement with two other Nations, but following a major court case, the agreement was *“split three ways on a per capita basis.”* Another wants an individual agreement so they can do fish counts on their rivers and streams and learn more about the fish.
- Participants are concerned that program funding has not changed *“even though operating costs and fuel costs have really changed.”* Some also noted that agreements are signed too late in the year.
- A few participants have difficulty working out their agreements. One thinks departmental regulations make the task more difficult. Another thinks the program is tied to policies and principles that have yet to be implemented, such as the Wild Salmon Policy and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### **Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements**

*“All of the technical activities meet Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program objectives.”*

- Most participants have data collection, stock assessment, and catch and fishery monitoring activities funded through their agreement. Two only have stock assessment

and catch monitoring activities, but they would like to have data collection funded through their agreements.

- Several want more comprehensive stock assessments. *“We go elsewhere to get money for salmon stock assessments – it’s done partially through AFS, even though DFO needs the data to manage fisheries properly.”*
- Others want to be more involved in data analysis, rather than simply collecting data. *“DFO takes all the data.”*
- One does not want the catch and fishery monitoring activities. *“We need a better understanding on what DFO uses this data for and how it will benefit the community. It’s probably more for DFO’s needs.”*
- Most participants employ fisheries technicians to do the technical work in their agreement, as well as activities funded through other means. A few also have biologists.
  - One said the program only funds part-time catch and fishery monitors in their community, which causes retention issues and a lack of coverage in remote areas. *“Some areas are so remote, it’s not possible for part-time employees to work there because their hours would be spent travelling to get there.”* This participant uses a local stewardship program to boost the work of catch monitors.
- Some participants do habitat restoration and rehabilitation work, but these activities are funded through other partnerships and/or using own source revenues. Others would like to do habitat restoration and monitoring work, but do not have the funds to do so. One has made multiple requests to the Department to use surplus funds for habitat restoration activities, but all have been denied. *“We were told that this doesn’t fall in line with program objectives and what the AFS is all about.”*
- Almost all participants do species at risk work and want this work (and the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk program) to be better aligned with the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program. *“Maybe one third of AFS agreement funding could be from AFSAR to extend the work of our technicians.”* One has species at risk monitors. Another uses species at risk funding for salmon rebuilding plans.
- Participants have different views about fisheries enhancement. Several are involved in fish hatchery work, some of which is funded through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy. *“In 1994, DFO started up community economic development program enhancement facilities, then they said the AFS could not fund enhancement activities.”* Others are involved in enhancement work with the Province. *“DFO used to fund the tagging recapture program, but they cut it.”* Some do not support fisheries enhancement.
  - Two would like to see fertilization programs in waterways to rebuild fish returns. Another wants to do manipulation so spawners reach their destination. Still another has to resolve capacity issues to be able to participate in enhancement projects.
- Some participants do community education and awareness activities through the program. *“I keep building my own capacity to do this work – even having acronym lists and pamphlets to explain to community members all things about fish.”*
- Almost every participant finds the technical activities funded through the program do not meet the needs of their communities; primarily, because of insufficient funding. Most want the program to fund ‘holistic’ technical activities, such as forestry monitoring and compliance, studies on forest fires and environmental disasters, water quality readings

and other hydrology monitoring, science and research on fisheries-sensitive watersheds, climate change studies, genetic analysis, and sediment studies. *“We really want to increase the scope of our fisheries program with environmental monitoring to ensure Fisheries Act violations are dealt with.”*

- There is consensus that the Department’s sectors need to collaborate and share resources with First Nations to broaden the scope of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program in order to improve the health of fish stocks, habitat and waterways across the Province. *“DFO is silo’d. We need to start blurring the lines of all of their individual programs to do serious work on salmon.”*

### Skills and Training Needs

- Participants say while there is training in the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program, it is mostly about safety; rather than capacity-building.
  - Several want more technical training, including for community biologists. *“AFS should fund ‘on-the-job’ technical and science training. This is inconsistent between agreements.”* One thinks training should cover why data is being collected and why certain methods are used to collect it. Another wants more database and data analysis training.
  - A few see a need for conflict and stress management training. Others support more training of DFO staff; especially, as part of succession planning. *“DFO staff have almost zero understanding about First Nations culture and rights, so there’s a lot of inappropriate behaviour that shouldn’t happen.”*

### Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program and Enforcement Authority

- While no participants presently have fishery guardians in their program agreements, most want guardians in their community. *“We had guardians in the past, but it went from two to one with the lack of funding, then to part-time, then we had to cut it.”*
  - The majority also want guardians to be involved in more than fish-related issues. For example, one wants the Department to consider how the program could complement the Indigenous Leadership Initiative guardian pilot or provincial wildlife conservation. *“It would be great to see a conservation-type guardian work on fish in the spring and summer and then wildlife over the fall and winter. This way, they would be full-time.”*
- Some participants are interested in having community members enforce fishery rules, while others think the Department should do more enforcement patrols in their areas. *“For a few years, our fishery officer was on his own, so he was not able to do patrols.”* Several pointed out that ‘enforcement’ today is only observe, record and report.

### Co-management

*“It’s not fair for some to be fish rich and others fish poor. What’s in place for true ‘sharing’ of the resource?”*

- Several communities have their own fishery management and conservation protocols. *“People are good about scaling back when it’s needed.”*
  - One decides how they want their fishery to proceed each year, including by making conservation decisions on each species and by enforcing those decisions using

community enforcement personnel. *“DFO would not have been able to push this through. Enforcement works if the community is involved.”*

- Others want more inter-tribal agreements so *“we know who is taking out what and about individual conservation initiatives.”*

## **Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements**

*“If there is a commercial fishery, Nations should be able to come up with a way for food fishing. It requires discussions at a higher level.”*

- Participants have different opinions about the sale of food fish. One thinks it doesn't make sense to prohibit the sale of food fish because there are expenses to getting this fish. *“We're getting around it by hiring local fish harvesters and paying their wages in return for fish.”* Others are concerned about the impact of economic opportunity fisheries, such as excess salmon to spawning requirement, on those who depend on fish for food. *“There are real moral problems, not to mention technical and political problems, too.”*
  - One is also concerned about the impacts of supplemental licences on fish escapements reaching inland fisheries.
- One participant would like to see money from the sale of fish caught by the Department in test fisheries go to First Nations to *“help us pay for boats and other fishing equipment.”*

## **Understanding Relationships**

*“We have a really good relationship with DFO enforcement – they follow the rules we set.”*

- Participants have varying relationships with Fisheries and Oceans Canada staff, with some saying it largely depends on the individual.
  - A few have good relationships with their fishery officer. *“He works really well with the community. When a huge net was found this year, he had them cut the net to comply with the rules.”* Another said while the local fishery officer will come to the community once in a while, *“more often people call our coordinator to work it out.”*
  - Most report having a good relationship with area office staff, but *“it goes dark when they do analysis on our numbers”* and a few do not know the program staff.
- Almost all participants have issues with stock assessment staff.
  - One has a ‘heavily strained relationship’ after being told that the community was not doing a good job counting last year. *“They threw out some of our data and counted on their own. We said there were fewer fish than they did. I thought it was a good program.”* Another said the Department took an average based on an area *“that would never have fish”* even though the community shared local knowledge about where the fish are found in a river.
  - Some notice a disrespect by the Department's scientist in their interactions with First Nations biologists and consultants. *“There should be more two-way respect and sharing of ideas.”* A few said they have sent DNA samples to the Department but *“they are either lost or ignored.”*

- One participant has trouble getting information to 'higher levels' of science at the Department. *"DFO scientists contributed to our research, but six months after sending it to the department, we've yet to get a higher-level response."*
- While there are different relationships between and among neighbouring Nations, participants stressed the importance of inter-tribal collaboration to protect and share fish. Participants who belong to an aquatic resource and oceans management group report having good relationships with them. Several also participate in the First Nations Fisheries Council technical committee.
- Some participants have partnerships with the Province for activities, such as climate change studies, tagging recapture projects, and fish habitat restoration.

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

*"If we could have only one thing added to AFS, it would be funding for fish recovery plans."*

- Participants think the most important way to improve the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program is by increasing funding:
  - for projects that help communities meet their food, social and ceremonial needs
  - to be able to pay better wages to fisheries staff and to continue to build their technical capacity *"Wages can't go over a certain level without having to cut something else out."*
  - to broaden the program's scope; especially, to add a habitat restoration component
  - to attract youth into fisheries-related careers in the community through internship opportunities and mentorship programs
- Participants also support increasing partnerships to build on the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program. *"I'm thankful for AFS funding, but partnerships are needed to expand our fisheries program and community work."*
- Some want more flexibility as to how funds may be used through the program. A few also want funding for strategic planning: *"We need strategic direction as there is so much need and so little funding and expertise."*

### Measuring Success

*"Success is having an agreement with all [watershed] Nations to equitably share fish and make sure spawning escapements are healthy."*

- Participants measure the success of the program by:
  - their ability to meet food, social and ceremonial needs
  - demonstrated capacity-building of community members *"How and what type of leadership skills are built through the program."*
  - fully functioning and healthy rivers, streams and lakes – and fish stocks
  - true co-management of the resource built into the program