

## What We Heard

*“AFS is much more than food, social and ceremonial fisheries; it’s a mechanism to protect our Aboriginal fisheries: industrial, rights-based and food, social and ceremonial.”*

### Getting to Know Communities and their Fisheries

- Participants included community fisheries managers, a designated fishery guardian, and a biologist and technical advisor to five Nations. All but one community has an Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreement.
- Communities fish a wide variety of species, including sockeye, chum, coho, pink, crab, smelt, mussels, barnacles, halibut, black cod, ling cod, trout, prawn, rockfish, sablefish, and other groundfish and shellfish – but only some species are communally fished. *“We try to spread out across different fisheries to keep the entire palate of fisheries in motion so we transfer inter-generational knowledge.”*
  - Most have community freezers to store fish for the community and a few distribute fish to both on and off-reserve members. *“We have issues with the economics associated with it. We have done it though.”*
  - One community does not have a freezer, so they only get one delivery of crab every year for food. *“They also have to pay for that crab.”* Others are concerned about the ongoing costs of fish storage.
- Participants shared a number of concerns regarding the future of their fisheries.
  - Some are concerned about the loss of traditional catch methods in communities. For example, one said the knowledge of traditional sockeye harvest methods is no longer transferred as members have to go offshore to catch sockeye using an industrial seine vessel.
  - Others are concerned about the impact of urbanization and climate change on fish and seafood. For example, polluted beaches in a few communities prevent crab and other shellfish harvesting.
  - Still others are concerned about the impact of commercial and recreational fisheries. *“DFO is aware of statement of intent issues, but a lot of fish is still harvested by commercial.”*

### Co-management

*“Inter-tribal agreements are about sharing of the resource. DFO does not really like this. We tried to find a way to work with DFO to make a system that would work, but it’s a problem with their adjacency policy.”*

- Communities often share access to fishing areas through inter-tribal agreements or protocols. *“Some years, DFO tolerates it and other years, not.”* These agreements

address barriers to access which may arise from communal licences being restricted to certain areas in which fish stocks have dwindled or may no longer frequent.

- In some cases, the Department's involvement in protocols has caused delays. *"The protocol took from June to September to get from DFO so it was too late and I had to find another Nation. I went through three harvesters this year to try to get fish."*
- Several Nations want co-management agreements to be more involved in managing the fisheries in their territories and to get more fish allocations. One has a co-management agreement with Parks Canada for their commercial mollusc fishery because their territory is encompassed by a National Park.
  - Some are concerned about the way the Department manages fisheries by spreading commercial data over multiple areas. *"This decimates fisheries and prevents adequate access for others."*
- Participants presently in treaty negotiations with the Department want Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreements to recognize treaty rights and co-management.

## **Understanding Food, Social and Ceremonial Needs**

*"Will you be able to achieve more certainty for food access through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy in the future?"*

- Participants stress the importance of community access to fish for food. One used the program to provide fisheries resources to members in order to reestablish their connection with country food and lower the community's diabetes rate of 30% down to 3%. *"AFS was part of that because it gave us better access to the resources and helped us purchase vessels to get out on the water."*
- Participants report that food, social and ceremonial fisheries are not meeting the needs of communities. More than one buys their food fish from another Nation and/or from commercial fish harvesters. Even in areas of abundance, participants said they are only successful in meeting the needs of the community some years.
  - Some think allocations in agreements need to reflect population changes. Others think agreements need to be more flexible so they can reflect species that are actually being fished rather than what was being fished in 1992. *"Agreements need to be able to adapt to changing abundance. A few years ago, we switched to halibut without a procedure to fish it."*
  - Still others need vessels for community members to be able to fish. *"We're facing issues, such as people not having enough money to buy a boat to go fishing."*
- Participants stress the need for the Department to address each element (food, social and ceremonial) as a matter of import to First Nations. Several think the Department is too focused on fish for food purposes, without recognizing community needs for fish for social and ceremonial purposes. *"For some Nations, ceremonial and social needs may be more important than food."*
  - One said fish are used at intergenerational community events to redefine the management and implementation roles of members in the fishery.

## Understanding Agreements

*“I wouldn’t call them negotiations with DFO; it’s more like a dictatorship and if we don’t follow the rules, we don’t get the agreement.”*

- While the majority of participants have had an agreement since the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program began, funding in these agreements has never changed. Some say allocations and technical activities have also remained the same. *“We’ve tried to get different things in it, but this has not happened.”*
  - One said their agreement was instrumental for capital as well as staff, but the majority say funding just pays for a fisheries manager.
  - Most have not been able to renegotiate their communal allocation despite trying. There is also concern that salmon allocations are based on a small percentage of returns in the 90’s, which means a very low amount on current returns.
    - While some participants said the Department has offered them other species when there are no opportunities to fish species listed in their agreement, *“this is not viewed as a real benefit, as it goes mostly to commercial fisheries.”*
  - A few reporting being restricted to a certain area for fishing, even though the route of the fish in their agreement has changed to a completely different area. *“The movement of Fraser sockeye to the inside rather than the outside of the Island is a big deal.”* Several also say the areas in their agreement do not reflect their Nation’s traditional fishery areas. *“They are not easily accessible, very narrow, and inadequate to meeting needs.”*
  - Others have challenges getting their agreement in place and signed each year.
- Some participants view agreements as being rooted within treaties. *“At least 10 First Nations are on the verge of signing Treaty, which will firm up fishing agreements in the long-term.”* These communities are disappointed that the Department has *“shown no appetite to change the AFS agreement”* in preparation for this signing.

## Understanding the Technical Components of Agreements

*“The program has been instrumental for many foundational aspects: habitat rehabilitation programs, catch monitoring, and community outreach.”*

- Every participant with an agreement has a catch and fishery monitoring component and one said it was meeting their community’s needs.
  - Catch monitors in one community record all the fish that is distributed to members (not just the catch) and do creel surveys. The fishery manager in another community reports catch numbers to the Department even though their members do not want them to. *“It’s been a source of tension between DFO and the Nation.”*
  - Some communities are concerned about the way catch data is stored in the Aboriginal Harvest Management System because it requires entering the name of a harvester. *“DFO has privacy on their system, why not ours?”* One has developed a way to remove the names so the Department only gets the information they need to receive.

- Most participants do data collection and stock assessments as part of their program agreement, but they do not always know where the data goes or how it is used by the Department.
  - While one set up a collaborative way to exchange stock assessment information with the Department, others experience a lack of reciprocal data-sharing even though they rely on the data to make decisions about their fisheries. *“It’s not ready accessible or easy to collect. DFO is not sharing it.”*
  - One would prefer a ‘co-management agreement’ that enables the ability to disseminate, rather than collect data, as well as other management functions.
- Some participants are involved in habitat rehabilitation and fisheries enhancement work, but this is not funded through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program. *“We just finished a four-year rehabilitation project that successfully removed sand and gravel in a major river. This is important work for the future of our fisheries.”* Another has invested own source revenues in stream restoration to protect steelhead.
  - Several want habitat and fisheries enhancement activities to be funded through the program. Others want to see a connection between program funding and the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk to better address species at risk issues.
  - One also wants to broaden their participation in more ocean activities, such as marine planning of traffic schemes *“to protect killer whales and critical habitat.”*
- A few participants note the value of the program in leveraging other funding sources, as well as contracts with the Department. *“We need the program to access activities, such as river escapement work and hydro contracts, because we don’t have an aquatic resource and oceans management group.”*
  - One is concerned that the Department is trying to narrow the program’s scope to restrict this leveraging aspect. *“When AFS came in, it had a narrow scope and we managed to bridge it out. We still want it to have that kind of flexibility.”*

#### Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

*“DFO lost faith in the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian program and didn’t want it to go anywhere.”*

- Participants report that there are no enforcement activities in the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy – and they are concerned by the lack of enforcement in their region.
  - One community has a designated guardian and they are interested in guardians doing more stewardship activities in order to protect food, social and ceremonial fisheries from mining, forestry and other industries. *“We’re trying to ensure there are fish to maintain the stocks.”*

#### Skills and Training Needs

- Participants stress having retention strategies and succession planning in the program as well as more emphasis on capacity-building. *“The high turn-over of staff is a big issue. We get them trained through AFS and then they find another job that pays more.”*

## Understanding the Economic Components of Agreements

*“Part of the revenue generated from Allocation Transfer Program licences goes back into our Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreement.”*

- A few communities received licences through the Allocation Transfer Program. One uses a portion of the benefits of these licences to buy food fish for the community. Another is not able to use their licence because it is for crab and they do not have funding to buy traps. *“There’s a lack of infrastructure in our area and ability to rebuild the capacity of members to participate. Capacity development plans are needed.”*
  - One wants licensing rules to be adjusted so by-catch caught in commercial fisheries can be transferred to food fish.

## Understanding Relationships

*“Because of the poor relationship, there is no place in which to talk to DFO about annual integrated fisheries management plans. This is a failure of AFS.”*

- Participants report having different relationships with the Department. For example:
  - Several shared their experiences with local fishery offices. One had a fishery officer attend a few of their community meetings who said *“if we ever need them, they are there to help.”* Another found fishery officers really supported their fishery when the nets of members were cut by vandals. *“They hid in the wings to make sure justice was done.”* However, two others said the fish harvesters in their communities feel intimidated by fishery officers on the water, which is affecting their fishing activities.
  - A few said they had good collaboration in the rockfish conservation area with resource management, but others said they only get invited to participate in larger stakeholder processes for fisheries management. *“No one comes to our community to talk about collaboration in science or other issues.”* One also said Nations are not informed about the research studies taking place in their areas.
  - Some said they have no access to senior staff even when regional staff do not have the answers to questions. Even those who report having a good relationship with the Department say they have challenges getting answers to bigger issues. *“There are a lot of referrals.”* In addition, every participant said they do not get any feedback or response when they make requests for more allocations. *“There’s no platform to have that conservation.”*
  - Participants also report that the Department uses Treaty talks as an excuse to put the agreements of those nations in limbo. *“This is not part of the Treaty – they are prepared to do an outside agreement.”* At the same time, the Department does not want to work individually with these Nations. *“It’s hard for DFO; they prefer to have them all in one room.”*
- Some report having good relationships with their aquatic resource and oceans management group, as well as their commercial fishing enterprise team. Others have difficulties working both within and without an aquatic resource and oceans

management group. One thought there should be more than one way to get involved in collaborative science activities.

- A few undertake community outreach activities to ensure members are involved in the fishery and Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy activities. For example, Nations in Treaty discussions held workshops on the fisheries and species in the area for members so they could understand fisheries and how they were managed. *“DFO has not had that level of engagement.”*
  - Several spoke about the meeting fatigue being felt by communities and concern over the amount of materials being sent for comment or input; especially, with so few staff members. *“We have a choice to make – a lack of resources forces us to choose – and we choose to work in the community, not to attend meetings.”*

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

*“We want DFO to consider economic, social and cultural assets in terms of the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy model. We need stable funding to put in place the number of people we require to do our work over the long term.”*

- Participants think the most important way to improve the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy Program is by increasing funding so communities can address inflation and the rising costs of administration, fuel and staff wages required to run their programs. They also want more funding to build a solid platform on which to expand and build long-term capacity.
- Participants want to focus on long-term planning and expansion because the current Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program is not meeting the needs or expectations of communities. *“Lack of funds prevent us from taking programs to the next level – it also prevents our ability to retain more people.”*
  - Some want fishery guardians trained in enforcement as well as environmental response and other technical activities. Others want more youth engagement. Many also want funding to repair vessels and to purchase new equipment.
- Several participants want the administrative and approvals process of agreements to be improved so it is faster and fewer people at the Department need to review it.

### Measuring Success

*“There is optimism that long-term fisheries agreements will replace AFS.”*

- Participants measure the success of the program by co-management agreements, recognition of treaty rights, increased fish allocation for food, social and ceremonial purposes, more capacity in communities, and increased funding.