



SUMMARY OF NATIVE FISHING ASSOCIATION COASTAL COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE

January 23rd, 2013

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

In December 2012 and January 2013, letters of invitation were sent by the Native Fishing Association (NFA) to all Coastal Bands and a broad spectrum of community members including Aboriginal Commercial Fishermen and Licence holders, Band Leadership and Stakeholders. The letter invited any interested parties to attend a consultation gathering entitled, “NFA Coastal Communities Conference,” held on January 23rd, 2013 at the Best Western Chateau Granville in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The purpose of the conference was:

- To seek guidance from the attending parties on how the Native Fishing Association and the assets it administers can best be used to protect, encourage, and enhance Aboriginal Fishers participation in all aspects of BC Commercial Fisheries.
- To hear the communities needs and ideas to turn the Pacific Integrated Fisheries Initiative program and the licences held in inventory by DFO on the behalf of First Nations fishermen into a more positive and effective program.
- Explore what communities can achieve with a unified voice, to make this program fit our visions.
- Identify and document common ground and goals.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CONFERENCE

On January 23rd 2013, the Native Fishing Association hosted the NFA Coastal Community Conference with a total of 55 individuals in attendance. Attendees represented a diverse cross-section of the Commercial Fishing Industry by including Fishermen, Retired Fishermen, Band Leadership, Band

Fisheries Staff, Independent Contractors, and representation from the Leadership Council. The conference also saw a diverse range of representatives from each regional area and Nations along the coast of British Columbia.

The conference took place over one day with the following Agenda:

- Brief background information on the Native Fishing Association, its assets, the current political climate and state of the BC Commercial Fishing Industry
 - The floor was then opened for discussion, where participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and suggestions with honesty and respect.
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SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

This section contains a general summary of the sentiments and recommendations shared during the Consultation Conference. Since many topics of discussion were addressed, the summary has been arranged by subject matter. These comments are further organized into two categories: the first, which summarises concerns expressed on a variety of issues, and the second, which outlines the mandates and next steps given to the Native Fishing Association.

OPENING

Chairman Ray Harris welcomed all conference participants to the meeting and thanked everyone for having been able to take the time out of their busy schedule to attend. This was followed by a moment of silence for all Ancestors and past members.

This opening was followed by NFA Chair Mark Recalma, who introduced the current members of Native Fishing Association Board of Directors (Edwin Newman, Paul Pearson, Ben Robinson, Mark Lewis, Arnold Clifton, and Bill Wilson), the members of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia (NBBC) (Chris Cook, Pamela Lewis, Henry Clifton, Tony Robert Jr., and Bill Duncan (absent)), and Saul Milne, the facilitator for the meeting.

The microphone was then passed around the room to allow every attendee to introduce themselves.

Mark provided background on the purpose of conference as the NFA invited all attendees present to receive input to where and how the organization can best move forward. As it stands, the organization only has limited funds, but wants to ensure that these are used in ways that will best support and enhance the participation of Aboriginal Fishermen within an industry that has changed drastically since the formation of the organization in 1985.

CONCERNS

SHIFTING POLICIES and THE PACIFIC INTEGRATED COMMERCIAL FISHERIES INITIATIVE (PICFI)

Feedback began by addressing where the Native Fishing Association, independent fishermen, and communities stand within the current climate of the fishing industry and the PICFI program. There are major concerns on how access to licences has drastically been reduced over the last few decades and, most importantly, how the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative (PICFI) is being run. Many feel that the government-run program has been imposed without discussing with First Nations fishers or considering proposed input.

Many people expressed similar feelings on how this program has proved unsuccessful since its implementation. Specific points brought up regarding PICFI included the following:

- No long-term guarantee for capacity building
- Access agreement timing: poorly administered licence transfers
- Licences being leased to highest bidders and non-Aboriginal fishermen.
- Struggles with affordability: many fishermen not being able to afford equipment
- Struggles with funding capacity: forced to lease out some of the licence as some fishermen cannot afford them.

Additional concerns were voiced on how licences were lost to companies and compensation never received.

CURRENT BENCHMARKS

Many concerns were shared regarding the state of the First Nations fleet and the realities that fishermen are facing with high costs of operating, the monopoly of the fishery by companies, and lack of control on PICFI licences and openings. As one attendee remarked, with a diminishing percentage of licences that are native-owned in fisheries that are becoming less profitable, if PICFI licences were to go, the First Nations fleet would be left with nothing. In relation, participants recognized the need to continue work on building an inventory of what is left and identify the current benchmarks of the First Nations Fisheries.

REMEDYING DIVISION and REGAINING CONTROL

Many comments focused on the need to regain control on licences and work collaboratively with a unified voice. The NFA was formed at a time when the fishing industry faced huge obstacles, high

interest rates and bankruptcy, but people met and worked together. Programs like PICFI and even court cases may have worked to create added division between communities, but many of the comments expressed the need to create a unified voice that speaks for and supports all interest groups within the First Nations fishing industry. Furthermore, comments echoed that it is crucial for control of licences to be transferred back to Bands in order to move forward and ensure the survival of communities and the commercial fishing industry. People are proud of the history and the work that the organizations have done, but as many remarked, the times have changed and the Native Fishing Association must change with it by becoming its own entity, and working collaboratively with all Bands and fishermen.

NEXT STEPS

SUPPORT FOR FORMING A UNIFIED GROUP

Feedback supported the need for a unified group, such as the Native Fishing Association, that can bridge across the scales of commercial fishermen, Community Fishing Enterprise, Bands and Tribal Councils and engage with the government to meet shared objectives and ensure that key issues are addressed. The following over-arching objectives were recommended:

- Advance First Nations economic priorities/interests in aquatic resources
- Maximize the benefit for First Nations economic interests in aquatic resources
- Work collaboratively to improve program implementation related to economic access, ensuring that full value for catch and employment is achieved
- Manage PICFI licence pools
- Act as a central coordinating body between, Coastal and Interior, and help develop best practices and criteria for CFEs to bring full value to acquisitions including to the individual level
- Support Interior CFEs by working with Interior Nations on tracking licences, facilitating transfers between Coastal First Nations and Interior CFEs to ensure full value of licences
- Develop a capital program to support capacity building and the acquisition of vessels and gear
- Address the overcapitalization
- Develop leasing policies for licences
- Supporting and increasing opportunities for young fishermen entering the industry
- Continue work on the inventory of the First Nations fleet.

As emphasized by Hugh Braker of Tseshaht, if the organization wants to coordinate between all groups, it must reflect how the times have changed and include fisheries like the Economic Opportunity and Interior fisheries. This inclusion is key if a central coordinating body like the Native Fishing Association is to work towards bridging and building cooperation between all First Nations Fisheries interest groups.

A RENEWED MANDATE FOR THE NATIVE FISHING ASSOCIATION

Participants clearly recognized the need for fundamental changes in the governance of the Native Fishing Association. The Native Fishing Association ought to be operated as a business and needs to design a new accountable and representative governance structure that demonstrates clear value to Aboriginal Fishermen, First Nations communities, and Commercial Fishing Enterprises. To accomplish this renewal the Native Fishing Association must transition to a freestanding organization. The Native Fishing Association was provided with recommendations for next steps, an engagement strategy, key products needed to develop and support the renewed mandate. This includes the development of clear Terms of Reference for a broad and representative Task Force. The Task Force will review, evaluate past business plans and develop an Action Plan that is representative of the evolving and diverse economic interests B.C. First Nations' have in the Pacific Fishery. As part of this transition work, the Native Fishing Association will continue to host regular meetings.

THE NATIVE BROTHERHOOD OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Native Brotherhood of British Columbia has a proud history of supporting Aboriginal Fishermen. The legal and policy landscapes have changed greatly since the inception of the NBBC accordingly the NBBC needs a renewed governance structure. Participants saw value in having the NBBC continue to maintain its core commitment to support and advocate for Aboriginal fishermen. There is a continued need for and value in having an organization like the Native Brotherhood who will organize and advocate for Native Fishermen. There were suggestions made on how the organization can restore membership and strength. Options should be further explored as both organizations transition away from interconnected governance structure into independent stand-alone organizations.

SUMMARY TABLE: ACTION ITEMS

The following summary table was presented and agreed upon at the January 23rd Conference. It further lists and categorizes the feedback that was received and provides guiding Action Items for the Native Fishing Association.

PURPOSE (Why) “We want our families to fish in the future”	Control of our destiny	“We can offer capacity and expertise to the government to determine our way forward”
	Bring full value for catch and employment	
	Approach to overcapitalization	
	Improve Licence Benefits	
	Access Agreement Timing	
	Improve Funding Access	
	Control of licences to be transferred back	
PEOPLE (Who)	Commercial Fishermen Province FED CFEs Tribes	-Challenge: to bridge the divides within and between each group -Scales, discipline, and LC process
	Principle: To advance First Nations Economic and Commercial Interests	
	Supporting Young Fishermen	
PRODUCTS (What)	Capacity and Assessment Mapping	To include: -Benchmarks -Our Vision -Scales -Criteria for success
	Improved Lending Policies	-Evolving the governance -Access
	Linkage Agreement	
	Strategic Plan and Communication Plan	
	Plan for Improved Use of Licences	
	Gain full value and benefit for current licences	
	Bridging between CFEs and Individual Fishermen	-how to navigate -coordinating process
PROCESS (How)	Leave History at the Door	
	Board Governance	-more representation
	Increase NFA Membership	
	Developing Principles	
	More Focused Dialogue	
	Strategy to Engage Across Scales	FED CFE Bands Individuals