

MEDIA RELEASE

New Dialogue Between First Nations and Fishermen's Groups

In an effort to create good relations and improved communications, fishermen's associations and First Nations involved in the lobster fishery in Southwest Nova Scotia have been holding a series of meetings to discuss common issues, challenges and opportunities.

Thus far, the group has included members from five Mi'kmaq Bands (Acadia First Nation, Bear River First Nation, Glooscap First Nation, Sipekne'katik First Nation and Millbrook First Nation), five fishermen's groups (Maritimes Fishermen's Union, Coldwater Lobster Association, Brazil Rock 33/34 Lobster Association, The Bay of Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association, and the LFA 34 Lobster Advisory Committee). In addition, the RCMP is engaged as a liaison to all the stakeholders in the interest of public safety, while Fisheries and Oceans Canada is engaged as a liaison to all the stakeholders in the interest of community engagement.

Their meetings, which are chaired by an independent facilitator, have been informal and self-directed. The participants have been very clear that their meetings are focused on direct dialogue, as opposed to consultation, negotiation or conflict resolution.

The group's purpose has been simply to establish lines of communication between people who have hands-on working involvement in the lobster fishery in LFAs 33, 34 and 35. The idea is to have a space to meet and talk, building on the good history of collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishermen in this area.

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Since June, five meetings have been held, in Digby, L'Sitkuk (Bear River First Nation), Yarmouth, Annapolis Valley and Bedford. Future meetings are planned in other locations.

Among the main themes that have emerged in the discussions are:

- the need for awareness-raising and education about rights-based fisheries
- building alliances to address issues that impact the whole lobster fishery
- fisheries activities that undermine legitimate fisheries
- the potential for cooperation on joint science projects
- a shared interest in increasing access to markets

The starting point for the meetings has been the recognition of fishing rights of the Mi'kmaq people. At the same time, participants have identified shared values, including:

- the responsibility for conservation of the resource for future generations
- a commitment to sustainable livelihoods in their communities
- a commitment to peace, ensuring that everyone involved in the lobster fishery can fish in a safe and secure manner.

Many of these commonalities arise from the fact the Mi'kmaq and non-Indigenous fishermen have a long history of fishing side by side, and from their shared experience as lobster fishermen.

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