



April 2022

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (POFO)

Regarding the 'Study the implementation of Indigenous rights-based fisheries across Canada'

Summary of Recommendations

The Canadian Independent Fish Harvester's Federation (CIFHF) is pleased to present the following recommendations to the Senate Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans as part of its ongoing study of the implementation of Indigenous rights-based fisheries across Canada. Each recommendation is expanded upon below.

1. **Convene one common table** – with governments, First Nations, local harvesters and impacted industry – to discuss collective issues of access and policy change in a transparent, collaborative fashion;
2. At this common table, **communicate a transparent plan to all communities** – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – outlining what the Government of Canada is considering around additional access and changes to fisheries policy;
3. **Provide a clear definition of Indigenous rights-based fisheries** so that all communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, share a clear and common understanding of what they mean, particularly on the transferability of these rights, how they relate to control agreements, how they potentially intersect with corporate or foreign interests, and what they mean for market access;
4. **Ensure a meaningful role for owner-operator organizations** in fisheries reconciliation and management negotiations, and a recognition of First Nations as owner-operators; and,
5. **Conduct a Senate study** on the corporatization of the Canadian fishery and the irreversible impacts of crippling foreign ownership on our coastal communities.

Background

Canada's fisheries bring great value to our coastal communities, and this extends far beyond solely their economic value. Fisheries connect us to our ocean and define the economic, social, and cultural fabric of our country's coastal communities. On top of this, local fisheries feed millions of Canadians, protecting our collective food security, the importance of which has been underscored by COVID-19. Underpinning all of this is the concept of owner-operator fisheries.

After existing as policies in Atlantic Canada and Quebec for over thirty years, **Owner-operator** and **Fleet-separation** legislation was brought in to ensure the benefits of an inshore fishing license are kept in the hands of local, independent harvesters, and the rural coastal communities they uphold. The current government has reinforced that maintaining the independence of small-boat owner-operators and implementing a fair and long-lasting licensing regime will help protect middle-class jobs and

ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery and hundreds of coastal communities.

For independent harvesters, inshore fishing licenses bestow a privilege that requires the holder to participate (owner-operator) with beneficial ownership that cannot be bound to a processor (fleet separation) or any other person or entity. That means that these licenses cannot be leased out or be subject to a control agreement with any other person, corporate or foreign entity. This is essential to building the local fisheries economy which is an essential component of a resilient coastal economy.

We have started to see a rapid erosion of owner-operator and fleet separation. Corporate and foreign interests are eager to erode these protections, as the value of Canada's fisheries is much easier to turn to profit through ownership or control of access rights. The erosion of owner-operator poses a real threat to the futures and livelihoods of Canada's independent fish harvesters – and the rural and coastal communities these harvesters uphold.

One way in which we are seeing the erosion of owner-operator play out in real-time is with the unintended consequences of reconciliation. The Federation and our members understand and respect treaty rights that exist for Indigenous communities. In fact, we have worked alongside Indigenous harvesters for decades, in training and mentoring, marketing, species advisory committees, and science and research. It is because of this working relationship that our members understand the need for respectful dialogue between commercial and Indigenous harvesters.

However, the current lack of transparency surrounding the communication of access and policy changes related to First Nations and their treaty rights has led to confusion and instability in rural coastal communities. As such, we are calling for the following:

1. **The convening of one common table** – with governments, First Nations, local harvesters and impacted industry – to discuss collective issues of access and policy change in a transparent, collaborative fashion. We recognize that sustainability on one ecosystem means working together.
2. **The communication of a harvest plan to all communities** – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – outlining what the Government of Canada is considering around additional access and changes to fisheries policy. A clear, transparent outline will bring stability to coastal communities and to the discussions about reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.
3. **Provide a clear definition of Indigenous rights-based fisheries** so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have clarity on the transferability of these rights, how they relate to control agreements, their potential intersection with corporate and foreign interests, and what they mean for market access.
4. **A meaningful role for owner-operator organizations** in fisheries reconciliation negotiations and in fisheries management and a recognition of First Nations as owner-operators.

The erosion of owner-operator has several far-reaching, long-term consequences. It:

- Puts at risk our collective food security;
- increases prices to the end Canadian consumer;
- takes corporate profits out of local communities and into the hands of corporate shareholders, too often in foreign hands or multi-national investors; and,

- jeopardizes the future of independent locally owned factories which can prevent independent fish harvesters (owner-operators) from negotiating a fair landing price.

Our coastal communities have the potential to be resilient, sustainable, and prosperous drivers of coastal economic and cultural wealth for generations to come. Alongside our First Nations allies, whom we welcome into the owner-operator model, we must do everything we can to protect this public resource. Therefore, we also provide the following and final recommendation:

5. **That the Senate Committee conduct a study on the corporatization of the Canadian fishery** and the irreversible impacts of crippling foreign ownership on all our coastal communities and our fishing industry.

About CIFHF

The Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters' Federation is the national advocacy voice for the 14,000 independent fish harvesters and small-vessel enterprises that harvest most of Canada's wild fisheries, including lobster, crab, salmon, shrimp, pelagic and groundfish. We have 34 member organizations who represent more than 43,000 crew workers, making us the single largest private sector employer in Canada's rural coastal communities. Combined, our harvesters spend more than 20 million hours on the water per year. Together, we produce over five billion meals, \$3 billion in landed value, generating over \$7 billion through the value chain.

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