

**Aboriginal Aquaculture Association
Aquaculture Planning Workshop
April 21st - 22nd, 2005
Campbell River, British Columbia**

Workshop Summary Report

Introduction

On April 21st and 22nd Aboriginal delegates from across British Columbia met in Campbell River B.C. for a planning workshop sponsored by the AAA.

The key objective of the exercise was to obtain directions from B.C. First Nations as to what were their priority areas for action related to aquaculture so as to enable the Association to better define the services and support functions that the AAA will provide and to make sure that they are aligned with the key needs of First Nations.

During the course of the two day workshop delegates provided critical input on what they believe are the opportunities, challenges, and key needs/requirements for aboriginal aquaculture development in British Columbia; and how the AAA can best serve its members' needs to support sustainable Aboriginal aquaculture development in British Columbia.

The focus of the workshop was to look towards the future and to identify the key things that need to be done to move forward. To stimulate the future oriented discussion and planning the delegates worked together to prepare a vision question that outlined, in broad concepts, the nature of their ideal future. This following vision question was defined and enabled the delegates to generate ideas about what needs to be done to achieve the described objectives for the future of Aboriginal aquaculture development in BC.

It is 2015 and BC's First Nations communities have regained access to coastal resources and their traditional maritime heritage. Through aquaculture development, the benefits derived from the resource base have been maximized and branded products are being successfully marketed. Cultural, environmental and economic sustainability are the foundation of this sector. How did we get to this point?

The workshop discussions identified several key initiatives that are deemed to be necessary to attain the ideal future outlined in the vision question and to address the key needs/challenges/problems/issues that are already facing First Nations with respect to aquaculture development, and clearly need to be addressed if we are to move forward.

These needs/ideas have been grouped into common thematic groups and are compiled below. There is a degree of overlap and interconnectivity between the various groupings and in fact many of the needs/ideas are interdependent.

Using the direction and guidance provided by the delegates, the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association will develop an action plan to guide the AAA efforts in supporting First Nation aquaculture development. This action plan will be taken to governments, industry and other stakeholders to secure the support necessary to advance Aboriginal aquaculture development in ways that are meaningful to our peoples and our communities.

Strategic Developmental Requirements

The participants outlined an extensive array of needs and requirements that they felt that the AAA needs to be addressing if the vision is to be achieved and First Nation aquaculture development in B.C. is to be successful and environmental sustainability assured.

The needs and required actions that were identified by the delegates/participants are outlined below as is the role and involvement expected/envisaged by the AAA in meeting these needs.

Information Collection, Dissemination and Quality Assurance

Perhaps the most important need that delegates believed must be addressed, and an issue underlining many of the areas of specific need that are outlined below, was the need for good information that could be trusted and relied on by First Nations as they made decisions related to aquaculture development.

Currently, there is uncertainty about much of the information that aboriginal people are hearing about aquaculture. There are also a number of critical information areas related to markets, the best opportunities for species development for BC First Nations, new technologies, how to obtain the necessary financing, technical, and management expertise, where clearly more information is needed. Also reliable information on the actual environmental impacts of the industry, and best management practices, to assure minimal environmental impacts, is of paramount importance

There was a clear desire for the AAA to play a clearinghouse role, and a quality assurance, quality control role, in making sure that Aboriginals not only have information, but have the right information.

The New Zealand Maori experience in aquaculture development was discussed. It was apparent that the Maori (despite their successes) had some significant setbacks that substantially reduced the level of success that they achieved. A principal cause of many of their problems and difficulties was that they were the victims of the agendas of other interests (including well intentioned academics pushing their “pet” research projects into commercial development), promoters pushing questionable initiatives, and unsound technical and business development advice that took them down wrong paths, or had them set up operations in unviable manners.

The delegates thought that while there may be things that could (and possibly should) be emulated from the Maori experiences in New Zealand, this “bad information leading

to bad decisions” problem which Maori aquaculture development is still recovering from, is something which should be avoided in British Columbia to the degree possible. And it was thought that the AAA should have as a fundamental role getting/facilitating good information to First Nations so sound decisions can be made, and First Nations be given the best opportunity for success.

Analysis of the Real Potential of Various Species and the Requirements for their Commercially Successful Cultivation

Participants believed that not only is good information required, but that specific projects are required to assess the potential for commercial culture of alternative species of finfish, shellfish and aquatic plants; specifically addressing:

- Marketability
- Technologies
- Economics
- Geography
- Value-added opportunities
- New species evaluation

The participants believed that it would be very important for the AAA to be directly involved in overseeing these projects and provide quality control and assurance on the projects, and to make sure that the information was properly disseminated to aboriginal peoples through the most appropriate mechanisms. This was viewed as a priority.

At a fundamental level, there is a need to make sure that Aboriginals are focusing on aquaculture development projects for species for which there is a good probability of success – particularly from a market perspective. There is a need to focus on growing what the market wants, and determining if we have the capabilities to produce what the market wants, and what specifically is required, and how/where to acquire the required capabilities. This is the best and surest path for success. But it requires more and better information than currently exists.

It also requires very hard evaluations. And the willingness to provide negative assessments for species where there is not a strong opportunity for success. B.C. First Nations interested in aquaculture development want success. And want to be focusing their efforts and resources on commercial development of species which have a good chance for profitable growout in British Columbia and that can be farmed in an environmentally sustainable manner.

AAA to Provide Support and Assistance in Project Feasibility Assessments and Business Planning

One of the principle areas of need, and one that is often overlooked (but which the delegates clearly identified) is the need for “up front” assessment, planning and business structuring assistance (there was mention by some delegates of the need to look at utilizing non political governance structures for the businesses). Currently such support is viewed to be lacking. This can and has prevented some projects from getting

off the ground and getting started, and other initiatives going forward which maybe should not have – or at least not in the manner that they did.

The First Nations delegates at the Workshops indicated that this is an important area for the AAA to provide support.

Marketing

Marketing and Markets were two of the key themes of discussion over the two day workshop/planning session.

There were several elements to this discussion. First it was clear, that there were marketing issues/challenges with the principal shellfish species that were being farmed (oysters and manila clams) and significant market/competition questions pertaining to the one for which substantial development activity was planned (Japanese scallops).

This will require market analysis to determine what could be done to improve the marketability of our oysters and clams. For instance, there may be the ability for better penetration into the Asian markets, if the right marketing “support” system is established.

It was felt that substantial marketing and potentially further product development like what was done with the Greenshell Mussel in New Zealand may need to be undertaken, and branded products developed, to address some of the marketing issues and to maximize both the competitive position of the sector and the value derived by producers.

As well, it was felt that development of the industry needed to be more market driven than it has been to date. Rather than first looking at what we have the technology locally in BC to grow, it would be better to find out first what the markets want, than determine if we can grow it on a competitive basis (determine if the technology exists and whether it can be obtained, and if we have the environmental conditions for competitive and sustainable growout).

It was pointed out that it is technically possible to grow almost anything, but the real question was could you make money doing so. Was there a market for it, and could you produce it in a competitive manner? If not, than it shouldn't be produced.

An example cited was if there are shellfish species that are in demand in the growing Chinese market, lets see if we can grow them, rather than trying to grow something that there is not much of a market demand for even if it may be easy to grow. And in general there was particular interest in finding out more about the Chinese market and selling into it if possible.

It was clear to the delegates that more information on markets is required, and there will be an ongoing need for market intelligence

To support these marketing requirements, the delegates felt that the AAA must take the lead on:

- Compiling market research and analysis (intelligence) information;
- Conducting strategic market planning on behalf of producers and processors;
- Facilitating and coordinating market access;
- Researching potential value-added opportunities;

- Developing an Aboriginal “brand(s)” supported by environmental certification and quality assurance programs; and
- Coordinating marketing of Aboriginal “brand(s)”

Acquisition and Dissemination of Technology and Technical Support by the AAA to First Nations

Along with marketing, the issue of acquiring the necessary technology is felt to be a critical one if the vision is to be achieved.

If the approach is to be one of identifying areas of market opportunity as the first step, and then trying to line up the technological and management capacity to do it, then there will likely be (and there actually are) species for which there will be market opportunity, but for which we do not have leading edge technology locally in British Columbia (or even in Canada).

These technologies will need to be secured.

Also critical for First Nations aquaculture development will be information on new technology developments and improvements on an ongoing basis, to make sure that First Nations have access to the leading edge technology and management know-how.

Delegates want the AAA to take the lead on behalf of the First Nations in securing access to the technologies necessary for sustainable and economically competitive aquaculture development, and making certain that they are disseminated to First Nations.

This technological acquisition support could also be in the form of the AAA facilitating Joint Ventures between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Firms (Canadian or Foreign).

Also it was felt that in certain instances pilot / demonstration farms, would be required and that the AAA would need to support and encourage the development of pilot project farms where applicable.

There is also a belief that in many cases the AAA may need to provide the First Nations with direct technical support on First Nations aquaculture development projects in the (1) preliminary assessment and planning phase; (2) Start-up; and (3) during operations –particularly regarding the dissemination of new technologies.

Financial Capacity of First Nations to Develop and Operate Aquaculture Ventures

If First Nations are to be able to participate in aquaculture, financing at every stage of development from preliminary start-up feasibility assessments and project planning all the way through to market and product development support, will be a key issue. Inadequate financing for development initiatives is already being cited as a problem.

Adequate financial assistance will be required: (1) to enable the requisite project feasibility assessments and business planning in support of First Nation’s aquaculture development; (2) for technical support for project development, engineering etc; (3) for

construction, inventory and operational costs until the operations are in a positive cash flow situation.

The delegates at the Workshop indicated that they thought that the AAA would be needed to assist First Nations in obtaining such financial support from Governments, investors, financial institutions, and if possible from Joint Venture partners who could also bring with them key technology and management know how – particularly for species that are not currently being successfully commercially cultivated in British Columbia (from in Canada or internationally).

The area of Joint Venture possibilities was one area discussed at length during the workshop. Delegates were quite interested in the possibility of Joint Ventures with Chinese firms that had the technology and management experience in cultivating species for which there seemed to be a realistic potential to successfully grow in British Columbia, and for which there was considerable market demand in China – the world's fastest growing seafood market. Such Joint Ventures could bring not only financing but technology and market access all combined together.

It was felt by the delegates that assistance by the AAA in filling out financing applications by First Nations would be important, and the AAA has to be prepared and able to provide such support.

And in fact, there are questions and concerns about where to get the financing. All the potential sources and how they can be used needs to first be clearly identified and that information disseminated to First Nations in an understandable and practical form. This is another area that First Nations believe that the AAA should provide assistance on.

Education and Training

Education and Training was identified as a key area for the AAA. Delegates felt that the AAA would need to:

- Identify needs for training and skills development
- Coordinate aquaculture training programming (skills development workshops, mentoring, internships, etc.)
- Encourage and support development of pilot / demonstration farms to serve not only as test facilities for new technologies and the farming of new species in BC but also potential as training and extension centres.

Environmental Sustainability

The environmental sustainability of aquaculture development in British Columbia must be assured, and that not only aboriginal operations needed to be sustainable but there must be assurance that non-aboriginal operations are environmentally sustainable as well. Delegates believed that this industry can be environmentally sustainable, but they believed that the Association has some important work that it must undertake itself so that First Nations Peoples can be assured that the industry is operating in an environmentally sustainable manner. Delegates believed that the AAA should take the lead on:

- Developing and implementing Codes of Practice / Best Management Plans;
- Developing and implementing effective and transparent environmental monitoring systems;
- Developing an Aboriginal environmental certification program with sanctions and incentives; and
- Communicating the results of the Aboriginal Environmental Monitoring Program to First Nations.

AAA Needs to Facilitate Cooperation and Communication amongst First Nations and Between First Nations and Other Organizations and Stakeholders

To the degree possible the delegates felt that a cooperative approach by First Nations through the Association with the BC Salmon Farmers' Association (BCSFA), BC Shellfish Growers' Association (BCSGA) and the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance (CAIA) is necessary – but that nonetheless keeps a distinctive Aboriginal presence to assure that Aboriginal interests and needs can be adequately promoted and protected.

There is a need to cooperate with other organization's involved with aquaculture to make certain that their initiatives are complementary (or at least not detrimental) to First Nations interests and needs with respect to aquaculture development. And because certain issues like food safety or CSSP reform is something that many groups share common interests in that can only be advanced through cooperation amongst various groups and Government.

The delegates recognized that quite clearly that there are many issues that must be addressed for success that require considerable cooperation and information sharing amongst First Nations. And the delegates felt that the AAA must encourage cooperative development among First Nations. And to specifically undertake or be involved in supporting key initiatives that transcend any one First Nation.

Participants also felt that it will be necessary for the AAA to:

- Identify and encourage potential partnership opportunities with non-Aboriginal partners;
- Develop further measures for public communications and community relations; and
- Foster community meetings, meaningful discussions and input.

AAA Needs to Coordinate

Along with promoting communication and cooperation, and being directly involved in initiatives (discussed elsewhere) the delegates felt that the AAA needed to be involved in coordination. Key areas where it was thought coordination would be particularly important are:

- Capacity building among First Nations
- Technology transfer workshops
- Communication
 - Customers / public → sustainability and quality

- Producers / Suppliers → regarding on-going and up-coming initiatives
- Identification of potential sources of investment and working capital
- Marketing and Market intelligence
- Employment services
- Due diligence review for potential partnership arrangements
- Coordination of R&D requirements in the sector
- Development of a strategic approach to Aboriginal aquaculture development

Access to Business Risk Programming

Participants at workshop believe that:

- AAA needs to assist in securing access to business risk programming for aquaculture ventures

Enhanced Access & Fair and Equitable Access to Coastal Resources (Species and Sites) for First Nations Aquaculture Development

The participants felt that:

- There needs to be recognition of aboriginal rights regarding resource access (sites and species). Enhanced Access is required – and that the AAA will need to work with First Nations to facilitate increased access to sites and species by First Nations.
- AAA needs to work with Government agencies to streamline the approval processes for First Nation aquaculture applications. There was specific mention about the need to streamline the environmental approval process. There was a suggestion made that the development of class-type environmental screenings by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to streamline the federal and provincial environmental assessment process for aquaculture sites could be of benefit.

The CSSP & Processing Capacity

The issue of the current state of the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program and the lack of surveys and resources for water testing was discussed as a constraint to B.C. First Nations Aquaculture Development.

It was recommended that there should be a review of the need for depuration facility(ies) for shellfish. Although the delegates believed that the Federal government needs to take substantive action and commit the necessary resources to “fix” the program.

Food Safety

Food safety protection and assurance in general was viewed as being critical. Delegates thought that the AAA should work with Government agencies and other stakeholders on an ongoing basis on food safety.

Aboriginal Leadership and Direction Setting in the Development of Aboriginal Aquaculture

Underlying much of the discussions during the two day workshop, and the discussions on how to move forward was the fundamental belief that Aboriginal peoples need to be driving the development of Aboriginal Aquaculture in B.C. to make sure that the interests and needs of First Nations are being met. Aboriginal interests and needs must become more important than they have been and Aboriginals must have a strong say in the directions of the overall development of aquaculture and enhancement in B.C.

It must be aboriginals speaking and deciding for themselves what they want and what is needed to be done.

The participants at the workshop believe that if the Federal and Provincial Governments are supportive, than through First Nations working together and supporting each other, much can be achieved in terms of First Nations aquaculture development and environmental sustainability of the industry.

First Nations should be given full opportunity to take part and benefit from aquaculture development in B.C. as leaders in the process not just participants.

As leaders, First Nations will be able to better make sure that development is consistent with First Nation social and environmental values, and that First Nation communities are getting their fair share of the economic and employment benefits of aquaculture development in British Columbia.

AAA Needs to be Provided with the Necessary Financing And Resources

It was felt that the taskings being put onto the Association would require considerable resources. And that if success by Aboriginals/First Nations in Sustainable Aquaculture development, and for First Nations peoples in BC at regaining access to the coastal resources (through aquaculture) is to be achieved, adequate financing for the AAA must be secured. This was a point raised quite strongly by delegates that the AAA not be under funded.