

# ► Summary

# Fishing for a Future

Understanding access issues and wellbeing among independent fish harvesters in British Columbia, Canada



## Introduction

Fishing has historically provided many jobs, supported many families, and defined many coastal communities in BC. In recent years there have been many challenges for independent fish harvesters including increased pressure on resources, climate change, declining stocks and increased regulations. The number of fishing jobs has decreased, community infrastructure and processing facilities have declined, and coastal communities have suffered from these losses. Taken together, these pressures hold potential implications for wellbeing within coastal communities and the very ability for coastal communities to persist.

One significant and growing challenge that has been identified by fish harvesters in BC is **access – the ability of fish harvesters to use and benefit from available marine resources.**

There are still significant gaps in our knowledge about access issues in BC which can undermine our ability to make informed programmatic decisions and policy recommendations to address access issues in BC fisheries and to promote wellbeing within coastal communities.

There is a need to consider what actions can be taken to support local wellbeing and the viability of coastal communities. Canada's fisheries and coastal

communities strengthen rural economies and rural-urban dynamics, support robust food systems and economies, function as the eyes on the longest national coastline in the world, and act as active stewards of the marine environment.

## Ask the fishermen

Over the past couple of years, a team of researchers and practitioners involved in the Ocean Canada Partnership have collaborated as part of a working group to better understand access issues and potential solutions. One initiative of the Access Working Group of the Ocean Canada Partnership has been to develop and implement a survey of independent fish harvesters in BC.

The survey was implemented on piers in coastal communities along the BC coast during the spring and summer of 2019. The survey included questions with rated responses, and open ended responses.

## Who was surveyed?

Surveys were conducted in coastal communities where there are active and independent fish harvesters along the coast of BC during the spring, summer and fall of 2019. Participants were active fish harvesters operating their own enterprise. A total of 118 surveys were completed.

## Project partners and funding



Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada



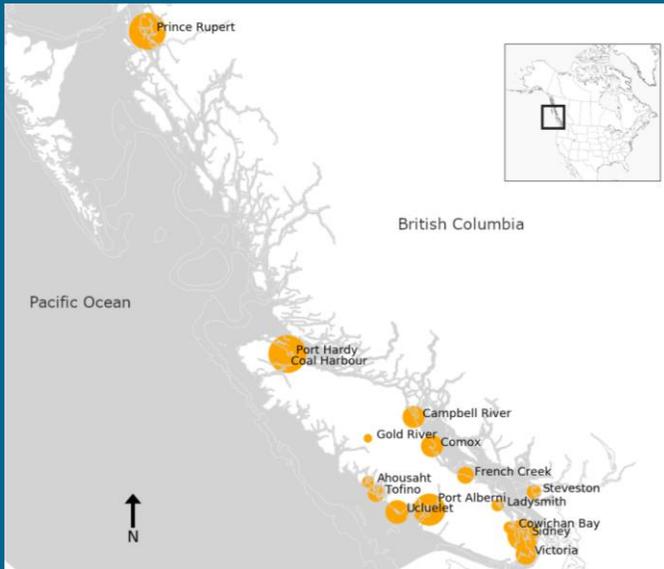
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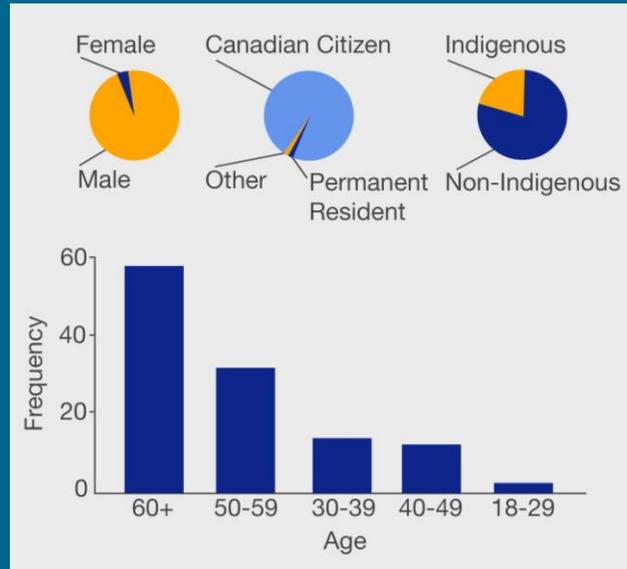
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
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Map of coastal British Columbia with location of fishing communities where surveys were conducted (size of circle indicates number of surveys in each location)



Demographics of survey participants. Harvesters who participated in the study were largely male and mainly citizens of Canada. Most were non-indigenous, and harvesters 60+ years old was the most common age group.

## What access issues are being experienced by independent fish harvesters in coastal communities in BC?

Survey participants were given open-ended survey questions focusing on issues facing harvesters, proposed solutions, and actions that could be taken to maintain or increase access.

### Issues facing fish harvesters:

Participants identified six main challenges facing fish harvesters:

- Access, quota and licensing
- governance and management
- competition with other fishing groups
- environmental factors
- fish farms
- marine protected areas

### Proposed solutions to those issues

The most important actions or solutions that participants identified to address those challenges included:

- protecting and improving access rights

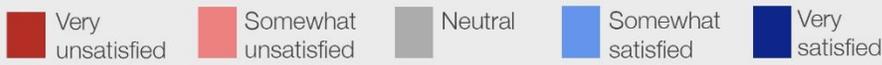
- better and more inclusive management
- fair treatment for all groups
- environmental restoration and management

### Individual and group actions to maintain or increase access.

Participants identified the following actions that fish harvesters and their organizations currently take to maintain or gain access:

- maintenance and preparation
- non-political networking and group involvement
- political engagement and advocacy
- augmenting licenses or quota
- diversifying and intensifying fishing activities

However, many participants also reported feeling powerless or that their organizations were unable to make a difference.



### Physical Capital



### Human Capital



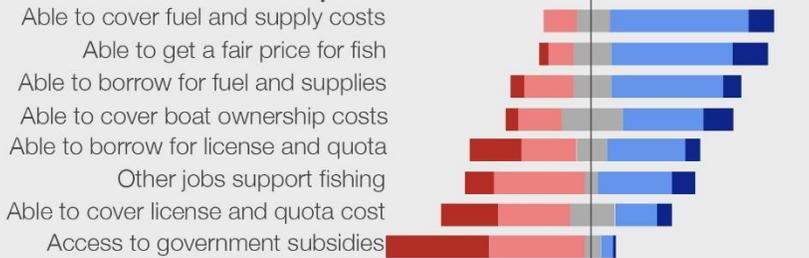
### Cultural Capital



### Social Capital



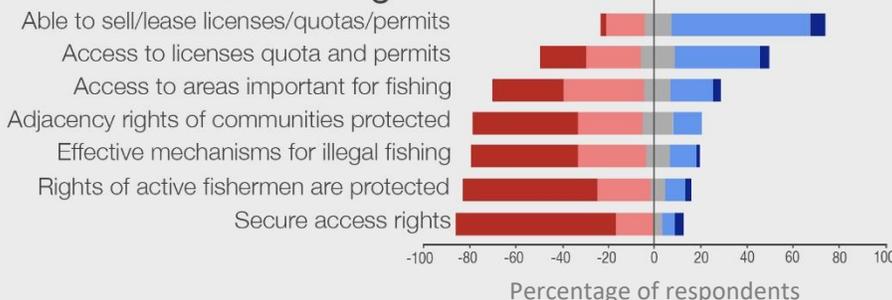
### Financial Capital



### Political Capital



### Access Rights



## How satisfied are fish harvesters?

Fish harvesters were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of being a fisherman. The survey focused on six categories of assets; physical, human, cultural, social, financial and political. Participants were also asked to rate their perception of access rights.

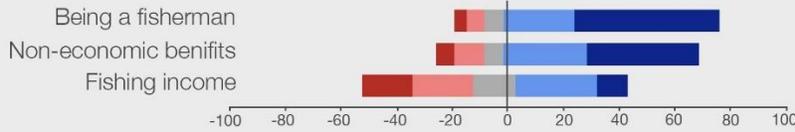
Fishermen responded that they were satisfied with most aspects of physical, human, and cultural capital.

Fishermen were much less satisfied with social, financial, and political capital.

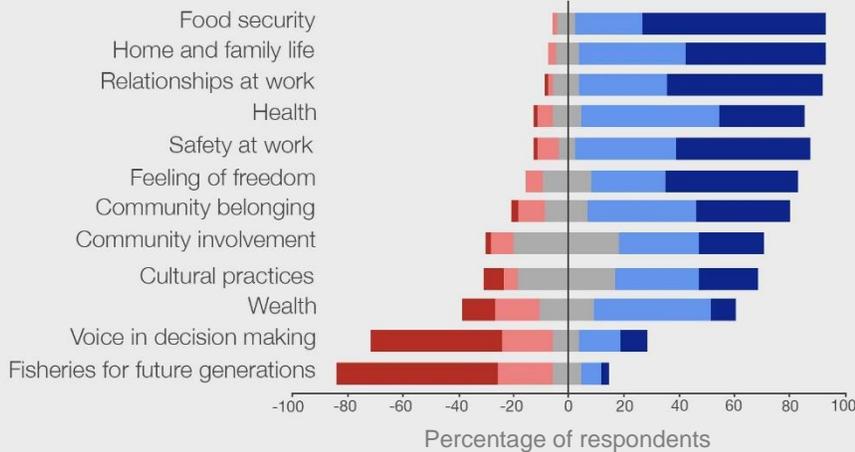
Fishermen were also largely dissatisfied with their perceived access rights.



## Level of satisfaction with being a fisherman



## Perceptions of wellbeing



## Perceived satisfaction and wellbeing of fish harvesters

Fish harvesters feel more satisfied with the non-economic benefits and being a fisherman in general, than with the economic returns.

There was an overwhelmingly positive perception of wellbeing among fishermen with the exceptions of wealth, voice in decision making, and fisheries for future generations.

## Conclusions

The results of this survey provide insights that are pertinent to current fisheries policy in Canada and that have implications for fisheries management in BC. First, the recent amendments to the Fisheries Act asks that social, cultural and economic considerations and that the preservation and promotion of independent license holders be taken into account in the management of fisheries. This mandate necessitates evidence from the social sciences about the status of fish harvesters and coastal fishing communities on topics such as wellbeing, access, rights, governance and other topics. Second, these results support the conclusions of the recent report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans titled “West Coast Fisheries: Sharing Risks and Benefits” regarding the need to address issues related to ownership, access, benefits, new entrants, and participation in fisheries management. In particular, survey results highlight a number of key issues for government and fisheries managers to tackle, which include:

- Improving participation in fisheries decision-making and management.
- Addressing significant and ongoing challenges related to license and quota ownership.
- Creating opportunities for the next generation to enter fisheries.

Addressing issues related to the human dimensions of fisheries is a key part of managing Canadian fisheries for the wellbeing and viability of fish harvesters and coastal communities.

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