Introduction

Fishing and related activities affect the quality of life of those directly involved and to certain extent the society as a whole through their contributions to human and ecological wellbeing.

Fishing is a practice that the aboriginal or first nation’s people of Canada have engaged in for generation, it is recognized as a keystone to the culture and economy of indigenous people.

The aboriginal people of Canada for example the Nisga’a nation have inhabited the Nass Area since time immemorial. This started to change from 1793 when a British sea captain named George Vancouver sailed his ship into Nisga’a waters.\(^1\) Aboriginal people of Nass valley like other communities across Canada traded fish and other goods with the Europeans. As commercial fisheries evolved in British Columbia, the access of aboriginals, who for long had been trading fish amongst themselves and European settlers, became reduced and maintaining their livelihood became threatened.

The challenge

The vision of first nation people fisheries action plan is focused on responsibility to protect their land, waters and resources and the passing of their traditional values and practices to future generation.

The aboriginal communities desire healthy, vibrant fisheries that provide a meaningful and sustainable source of employment to the indigenous people.

Numerous indigenous communities in accordance to the British columbia first nations fisheries action plan, have prioritized their support for fisheries that are both ecologically and economically sustainable.

Through litigation, Aboriginals have established their right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes (R v. Sparrow, 1990). However, the first nation’s fishers are experiencing financial crises which subject them to desperate measures like offering their fishing licenses for sale at rock-bottom bargain prices thereby liquidating their assets, which causes them to lose

---

\(^1\)The Nisga’a Lisims government http://www.nisgaanation.ca
future access to the fishery. These undesirable situations have geared the associations such as the Native Fishing Association and the Northern Native Fishing Corporation to propose devise measures to secure the livelihood of their citizenry and help them secure a future amongst competition with non-indigenous fishers. Non-profit organizations like Ecotrust Canada a have also been at the forefront of designing logistics for effective license banks.

Opportunities from Fishing Licence bank:

Treaty negotiations between the Government of Canada and First Nation communities as regards fisheries management aim to find a balance between providing First Nations with a greater role in the management and commercial use of fish, while protecting the interests of non-aboriginal fishers as they co-exist and will continue to do so.

For example, the Nisga’a Treaty and Harvest Agreement sets out an annual allocation of salmon comprising, on average, approximately 26 per cent of the Canadian Nass River total allowable catch. This right is subject to conservation and allocations may be reduced if stock is not available in a given year. The right to commercial fishery, so established by the treaty gives recognition to the fact that fish is not only an essential part of the First Nation’s culture but it plays a significant part to restoring economic self-sufficiency of First Nation.

The launching of fisheries license bank will forge a way forward towards the fisheries sustainability and local fishermen empowerment. This can all be attributed to the fact that the necessary tools to make this occurrence possible can be found in the agreement made by the government of Canada and the Nisga’a Nation. This agreement initiated a lot of progress not only in the Nisga’a nation but the entire First Nation Communities as more agreements are now in the pipeline.

---

2 A start up guide to fisheries license banks http://ecotrust.ca/project/a-start-guide-fisheries-licence-banks/
3 Nisga’a Final Agreement http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=81CB3D169ECC4F1787D629B3E4B6FC99