



ATLANTIC POLICY CONGRESS  
OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS SECRETARIAT

# National AAROM Virtual Youth Gathering

HEARING FROM THE YOUTH REPORT

MAY 20, 2021



## ATLANTIC POLICY CONGRESS OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS SECRETARIAT

### *Executive Summary*

On February 11, 2021 from 1:00pm to 4:00pm EST, the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)'s Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM) program held a national youth gathering to hear from Indigenous youth how they can be better supported in their aspirations to follow careers in fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans science. The gathering took place on a platform allowing for youth to come together from coast to coast to coast. Twenty-two (22) youth registered with seven (7) attending the breakout sessions, some still in high school, some currently attending university in the field, some working in the field, and some working in the field with aspirations for continued studies.

The purpose of the virtual gathering was to have a forum for youth to learn about current AAROM program initiatives and convene and discuss whether these initiatives can help them meet their career aspirations. As well, identify what other future initiatives and meetings are needed to support them in pursuing careers in the fields of fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans science.

Presentations were given by Elders, DFO experts, and youth panelists. The panelists shared their career journeys, their educational paths, the supports, and encouragements they got along the way, and what they like(d) best about working and studying in this field. Participants engaged in polling questions and breakout sessions to share their views about the supports they need to follow or continue in fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans science fields. The three main themes that the youth shared is that they are drawn to the AAROM program because it is community-led and engaged, it respects ecological and traditional knowledge, and AAROM departments promote and support youth engagement and career development.

The key takeaways from the session to enable youth participation were to recruit a National Youth Development Officer (YDO) to work with AAROM departments, DFO, or other partners on youth initiatives. In addition, the recruitment of Regional Youth Development Officers would help with the management of the youth program development and implementation at the regional level. There is a need for developed youth programs at the national or regional level using a Western-Indigenous collaborative approach. Individual AAROM departments could take responsibility for programs specific to their expertise and offer online or in-person courses to youth across the country by accessing funding under the AAROM Innovation and Collaboration Fund. This could become part of a career development curriculum with a certificate to help build experience in AAROM departments work environments and create opportunities for youth to become Ambassadors for AAROM network initiatives. The Ambassadors would share their knowledge in classrooms and with youth groups to bring greater awareness to AAROM network initiatives and principles to the emerging leaders in the communities.



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### Youth Gathering

#### Opening Prayer

We began our workshop with British Columbia Elder, Clifford Atleo, Sr. (Wickaninnish) who offered a prayer chant, which was gifted to him by his Uncle. The chant asks the Creator to hear our prayer. He prayed in his language, Nuu-chah-nulth, and translated for us.

*“Creator, we thank you for all that you provide to each and every one of us. Thank you for this opportunity for young peoples to put their minds together in the pursuit of their passions looking after the oceans and the resources. We ask for your guidance in our deliberations and ask for your blessings for all of our Elders wherever they might be and ask you to lift up the spirits of those who are grieving and a healing hand for those in need and safety for all of our Elders wherever they might be. We ask for your help in defeating this awful COVID-19. We ask you watch over all of our people. Make Canada kind to our people too.”*

Elder Atleo offered encouragement to the youth and extended gratitude for their interest in oceans management. He also shared with that these are difficult times on a global scale and kindness is needed. Elder Atleo also shared that all things are interconnected: humans, ecosystems, and the spirits. We have a responsibility to the entire community when we take from the earth. We do not exceed the lands capacity to give. If one person is hungry everyone is hungry. This is part of how we govern ourselves in relation to the lands.

He gifted many lessons throughout our time together and we thank him for these offerings.



Elder Cliff Atleo Sr. Photo Source: <https://vimeo.com/169389730>



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### *Overview of the AAROM Program*

The AAROM program was established in 2004 – after it was found that Indigenous groups were creatively pooling resources to collaborate on habitat, science, and oceans activities along an ecosystem or watershed. AAROM supports Indigenous organizations as they develop, grow, and maintain aquatic resource and oceans management departments (referred to as “AAROM departments”). AAROM departments across the nation provide numerous services such as: developing and conducting research projects; developing and providing youth education and programming; conducting Indigenous Knowledge (IK/TK) studies; and providing summer student employment opportunities, to name a few.

Erika Perrier, Senior Program Officer, shared with youth an overview of the origin and purpose of the AAROM program and the new initiatives that AAROM departments are collaborating on with DFO Indigenous programs to both promote the AAROM network and increase collaboration across the country, such as the creation of the AAROM Hub website ([www.aarom.ca](http://www.aarom.ca)). The AAROM Hub website is hosted by the Mi'kmaq Maliseet Aboriginal Fisheries Management Association (MMAFMA), an AAROM department, and is a platform to both promote and showcase AAROM departments. The intent is to expand and grow this website in the future to be a key resources pertaining to the AAROM network across Canada.

She also shared the important work done by the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute (NIFI) under their Indigenous Training and Skills Development project. In their research, they developed an outline of various potential career paths that can be held within AAROM departments, as well as outlining different certification and training requirements for key roles (see Figure 1). To further support AAROM departments, DFO is also working with AAROM departments to co-develop support structures, such as a Capacity Development Team and a National Training Coordinator. These new structures provide an opportunity to incorporate feedback provided by the youth to ensure they are aware and receive access to training opportunities, internships and other resources.





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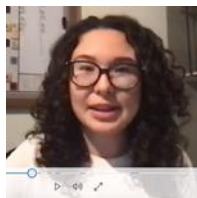
Figure 1 Sources from the NIFI Indigenous Training and Skills Development project at <https://indigenousfisheries.ca/en/projects/training/>.



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### *Panel Discussion*

As part of the youth gathering, four panelists from different regions throughout the country were identified and asked to participate and share their experiences working in the field of fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans science. The four panelists were:



**Melissa Shirey, Biologist**  
**Gitanyow First Nation, BC**  
Gitanyow Fisheries Authority

Melissa Shirey is a member of the Gitanyow First Nation located in Northwestern BC (Skeena and Nass watersheds). She feels honoured to be employed by her own people to help with the sustainable management of salmon, one of Gitanyow's most important resources. After completing her Bachelor of Science degree in biology (2019), she has been working as a biologist for Gitanyow Fisheries Authority for almost two years. Prior to securing the full-time biologist position she worked for the organization as a seasonal fisheries technician for three summers while completing her education. Melissa shared that she has a deep appreciation for the lands and working in this field has been rewarding because she gets to work to help her people and the salmon. She says she loves multiple aspects of her job especially the field programs and the impact that her work has on pushing for more sustainability management of Sockeye Salmon. The stocks are not in a good state and the Salmon are important to her Nation.



**Charlie Marshall, Policy Analyst**  
**Millbrook First Nation, NS**  
Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat (APC)

Charlie Marshall is a member of the Millbrook First Nation located in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia). For the last three years, Charlie has been a Junior Policy Analyst in the Fisheries and Integrated Resources department at the APC. Charlie shared that his connections to the waters began in early childhood. He would spend hours on the river every day in the summer whether it be fishing or playing in the water. In 2012, he pursued a university degree because he knew he either wanted to give back to his community or to the greater good. Charlie completed an interdisciplinary degree in aquatic resources. He thought this would be an excellent opportunity to support aquatic resources. Charlie explained that he suggests that

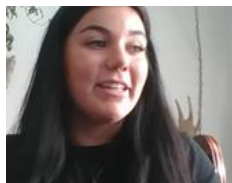




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youth take as many opportunities as possible whether those are volunteer experiences or a variety of job experiences. He says that one of the best positions he ever had allowed him to be snorkeling in the river counting fish and now he is excited to impact policy on species at risk.

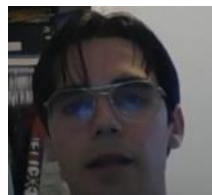
*\*APC's Fisheries and Integrated Resources department is a Regional AAROM department within the greater AAROM network.*



**Tanya Condo, Research Technician**  
**Gesgapegiag First Nation, QC \***  
Mi'gmaq Maliseet Aboriginal Fisheries Management Association (MMAFMA)

Tanya Condo is a member of the Gesgapegiag First Nation, located along the Bay of St. Lawrence watershed in Québec. She says that being in the waters and on the lands was an important part of her childhood. She says after her first summer field technician assistant position, with MMAFMA, she became good at identifying fish species. Tanya shared that her field technician and research skills continued to develop with every contract that she took with MMAFMA. She has been able to participate in stripe bass, sea cucumber, lobster fishing, and sea kelp studies. She enjoys the field work tremendously but explains the data entry is a lesser enjoyed part of this important work. Tanya explains that she is very grateful to her organization because they believe in her, they really like her work, they continue to encourage her to take on new roles and they continue to offer her training. Tanya has been able to do some historical studies and was trained in how to do Mi'gmaq ecological knowledge (MEK) studies where she gets to talk to Elders and learn a lot about her own culture.

*\*MMAFMA is an AAROM department within the greater AAROM network.*



**Cameron Pye, Masters of Fisheries Science and Technology Student**  
**NunatuKavut Community Council, NL**  
Marine Institute

Cameron Pye is a Master of Fisheries Science and Technology student at the Marine Institute in St. John's, Newfoundland. Cameron is from Charlottetown, Labrador, and a member of the NunatuKavut Community Council. He is doing community-led research that blends environmental policy and marine protected areas, specifically using adaptive management practices to reduce fishing pressures on Golden Cod in Gilbert Bay, Labrador. Gilbert Bay is a marine protected area. Cameron's first bachelor's degree



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was in biology, after which he completed an education degree. Cameron spent eight months working with the NunatuKavut Community Council when the opportunity arose to pursue his master's degree. He is passionate about ecology and conservation. Cameron wants to be able to live and work in Labrador; this is where his heart is, so working on this research for his community is his dream. Cameron shares that he highly suggests that if you are interested in this field, do not hesitate to reach out to experts in the field. There are a lot of knowledgeable people out there who will be willing to point you in the right direction. Even with COVID-19 right now, people are willing to guide you.





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### *Oral Story on aquatic resources and oceans management by Gerald Gloade*

Gerald Gloade is an artist, carver, and educator from Millbrook First Nation, located in Nova Scotia. Gerald started his career working as a Graphic Designer for the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources' Communications and Education Branch. The focus of his work with the province moved from Forestry Education to Wildlife, Wildlife to Nature and then from Nature to Native. After 25 years with the Department of Natural Resources, Gerald is currently assigned to the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq to work on the Mi'kmawey Debert Project through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs.

Gloade's stories captured the attention of the youth at the gathering. They remarked on how they greatly appreciated hearing his teachings, which were made ever more accessible through the visual stories told through his art. Amongst the many teachings shared by Gloade were several words of wisdom to the youth. He shared that our languages are embedded with ecological knowledge and studying our languages will offer deeper insights. The moon phases, as described below, are one such example to show how languages share ecological wisdom.





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### *Hearing from the Youth*

The virtual youth gathering was an opportunity for youth to learn about the AAROM program, and convene and discuss whether the current initiatives can help meet their career aspirations. Also, to identify what other resources or initiatives are needed to support them in pursuing careers in fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans science. The following key findings are ranked, most significant to least significant, based on the data collected from the breakout discussions, polling questions and the post-workshop survey.

Major key findings:

- ***Internships:*** The participants expressed the importance of having an internship with an AAROM department. These internships would allow youth to gain work experience, networking opportunities, career exploration, gain professional feedback, learn from mentors, build their resume, and figure out their interests. All these experiences that come with doing an internship are invaluable in early career development. Internships also help the employers; the employers are also training or grooming an individual that they believe can contribute to their organization in the future.
- ***Guidance and mentoring:*** Guidance and mentoring were essential to youth. Many youths expressed the importance of advice and mentoring on potential career paths, career advancement, recommendations on post-secondary programs, and general life. Mentorship programs have similar benefits to an internship but can be far more cost-effective.
- ***Scholarships and bursaries:*** Youth had also expressed the need for scholarships and bursaries. Financial support throughout an individual's educational journey is always helpful. Bursaries can also benefit the AAROM department by giving them out; the application process can help identify students studying in a related field. In turn, the AAROM departments will know which students have better academic standing.
- ***Youth learning and career development:*** The youth had expressed the need for career development through training programs, workshops, and certificate programs. These new skills would help supplement a post-secondary degree and help position the youth for future employment.
- ***Learning from Indigenous knowledge holders:*** Indigenous knowledge is invaluable, especially for AAROM departments. A potential Youth-Elder Knowledge Exchange had garnered a lot of interest from participants in the virtual youth gathering. Gerald Gloade's presentation sparked interest among youth at the gathering.
- ***More innovation and collaboration:*** Innovation and collaboration had come up throughout the youth gathering. The participants stated a lack of collaboration with youth currently not



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employed in a related field, and ageism was identified as an issue in many organizations. The youth had expressed that their inputs are not always heard and lack confidence when providing input.

- ***Job and career fairs:*** Youth had expressed that there is simply a lack of exposure to potential careers in the fields of fisheries, aquatic resources, and ocean science. Job and career fairs at high schools and universities would be an excellent way to expose Indigenous youth to potential careers. AAROM departments could recruit from schools on reserve to engage community youth.

### ***Key themes from the participants voices***

#### ***Invest in Youth***

There are many reasons why investing in youth can have significant social and economic impacts. Developing an interest in AAROM departments through a Western-Indigenous approach creates an opportunity for youth to blend their educational backgrounds with their heritage for meaningful career paths. A national Youth Development Officer who can help access and potentially distribute funding working with AAROM departments to provide an opportunity for collaboration and specialization. In addition, the new AAROM Innovation and Collaboration Fund can add eligible activities that focus on youth engagement through internships, youth programs and workshops, bursaries, and mentorship programs. The additional funding would also allow AAROM departments to engage with future employees and build capacity.

#### ***Adapting to the virtual world***

The National AAROM Virtual Youth Gathering was a significant first step in connecting youth across the country to share their perspectives on careers in fisheries, aquatic resources and oceans science. A recommendation is to continue facilitating an annual youth gathering and develop skills development workshops that can be delivered online throughout the year. Virtual workshops and webinars would be great for Youth-Elder Knowledge exchanges or Western-Indigenous ecological knowledge approaches. Gerald Gloade's presentation inspired the participants to continue to learn their language and why the development of ecosystem knowledge is vital to the field of fisheries, aquatic resources, and ocean science.

#### ***Youth should be considered when developing Policy***

When developing policy or making changes to existing policy, youth voices should be included. Youth engagement is important, and it would allow youth to gain experience in participating in working groups and learning how policy is developed. Engagement in policy development helps the youth understand the importance of sustainability and providing for future generations.



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### ***Changes to the summer student employment program***

Another recommendation is to continue to support summer employment opportunities within AAROM departments and create a broader promotion program to reach more youth across the country. This provides an opportunity for students to gain specialized knowledge from individual AAROMs and build a series of webinars and workshops for a certificate program. Youth can apply to work with AAROM departments and become Ambassadors for communicating the programs and research findings to a broader audience of youth.

### ***National AAROM Virtual Youth Gathering Action Plan***

#### ***Invest in Youth***

The key takeaways from the session to enable youth participation were to recruit a national Youth Development Officer (YDO) to work with AAROM departments on youth initiatives. Also, the recruitment of regional YDO would help with the management of the program development and implementation at the regional level. There is a need for AAROM departments to develop programs at the national or regional level using a Western-Indigenous approach. Individual AAROM departments could take responsibility for programs specific to their expertise and offer online or in-person courses to youth across the country. The programs could be part of a career development curriculum with a certificate to help build AAROM environments and create opportunities for youth to become Ambassadors for AAROM initiatives. The Ambassadors would share their knowledge in classrooms and with youth groups to bring greater awareness to AAROM initiatives and principles to the communities' emerging leaders. See Appendix A.

### ***Conclusion***

The virtual youth gathering was an excellent way for youth across Canada to come together and share their voice to support them in pursuing careers in the fields of fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans science. The data collected from the polling questions and breakout discussions during the youth gathering and the post workshop survey were able to identify what current and future initiatives the youth need most and provided recommendations based on those results provided in this document. This can also help inform future youth initiatives throughout DFO to ensure Indigenous youth are supported in their pursuit of careers in the fields of fisheries, aquatic resources, and oceans management.



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### Appendix A: Action Plan

Key Initiatives	Youth Participation	AAROM program	Resources
	<i>Participation</i>	<b>Capacity Development</b>	<i>(Federal, provincial, territorial/industry)</i>
Youth Development Officer	Promotion to Youth	Hosted by AAROM department(s)	Funding Assistance
Internships	Promotion to Youth	Managed by AAROM departments	Funding Assistance
Programs & Workshops	Input on types of programs	Development managed by YDO or AAROM department-led projects & workshops	Funding Assistance
Bursaries	Promotion to Youth	YDO Co-Mgmt.	Funding / Co-Mgmt.
Mentorship Programs	Promotion to Youth	Co-develop, managed by YDO/AAROM Hub website	Co- Development
Training	Input on types of programs	Development managed by YDO/AAROM department training	Funding Assistance
Youth-Elder Exchange	Co-Creation	AAROM departments	Funding Assistance
Western-Indigenous Ecological Approach	Co-Creation	AAROM departments Co-Creation	Funding Assistance
Learn the language for AAROM environments	Promotion to Youth	Co-Development managed by YDO	Funding Assistance
Participate in Sustainability Policy Initiatives	Co-Creation	Co-Creation	Co-Creation
Summer Student Engagement	Promotion to Youth	YDO Co-Mgmt.	Funding Assistance

Source: The National AAROM Virtual Youth Gathering Report – February 2021, APCFNC