

# Report on the National AAROM Meeting

February 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Coast Capri Hotel

Kelowna, British Columbia

Hosted by the Okanagan Nation Alliance



## OVERVIEW – THE ROAD TO KELOWNA

The National AAROM meeting was inspired by the Indigenous Program Review Phase One report that was released by the National Indigenous Fisheries Institute in May 2018. The report highlighted the:

- significant capacity built by AAROM departments, and that there are further opportunities to grow the network and diversify activities/services
- need to support networking between AAROM departments so as to share information, advance collaboration and promote the network.

The Indigenous Program Review also established a new standard for collaboration between Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and Indigenous groups, and from the start, it was important that the National AAROM meeting be co-designed and co-delivered with AAROM departments.

In September 2018, a National Steering Committee (SC) was established with volunteer representatives from AAROM departments across the country and two Fisheries and Oceans Canada National Headquarters (DFO NHQ) staff. The SC co-designed and co-developed the meeting's purpose and overarching objectives (see text box). It also oversaw the development of the agenda and the planning for this inaugural meeting, with the intent that this would provide a template for future annual National AAROM meetings.

Early on, it was recognized that this meeting needed to be “hands-on” and provide practical benefits for AAROM departments (i.e., address key challenges and opportunities). With this in mind, the SC sought to deliver a technical and collaborative working meeting. This informed the design of individual sessions, along with the decision to limit the number of participants (for both AAROM departments and the Government of Canada) so that everyone could be an active participant. Both prior to the meeting and during the meeting itself, the SC also sought feedback from AAROM departments on the event's design. This has been a learning process for all and lessons learned (e.g., what worked, what didn't) will inform the design and planning of future meetings.

Having this meeting hosted by an AAROM department was also essential as it provided an opportunity for the host AAROM department to showcase regional realities and initiatives, as well as deliver event-related services. The Steering Committee is extremely grateful that the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) agreed to host and help organize this inaugural National AAROM and we also thank the Syilx People of the Okanagan Nation.

### National AAROM Meeting Purpose

To bring together technical Directors of AAROM departments for an operational meeting with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to co-design and co-deliver the renewal of the AAROM program, while building and strengthening the network of AAROM departments.

### Overarching Objectives

- Build a network of technical Directors of AAROM departments.
- Communicate the Department's initial plan for the renewal of the AAROM program with a timeline for implementation.
- Discuss new elements of the AAROM program and receive guidance on co-delivery mechanisms.
- Receive guidance on collaborative efforts between AAROM departments and external partners.

## THE MEETING

The inaugural National AAROM meeting was hosted by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA), February 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Kelowna, British Columbia. The first day was intended to be a meet and greet at ONA's kł c̓əłk̓ stirm̓ fish hatchery to have an official welcome to the territory and showcase ONA's AAROM department. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, the tour was canceled. Therefore, the official kick-off to the meeting was on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

All presentations made at this event are available in pdf format through the internet on Google Drive. To access the presentations, please use the link below:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gO0ocRVWxzPWENU6SWkCaw3\\_Y-P46-9I?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gO0ocRVWxzPWENU6SWkCaw3_Y-P46-9I?usp=sharing)

The presentations are summarized below along with key feedback and recommended next steps. Next steps are based on participants feedback through breakout sessions and discussions.

### AAROM Renewal

Steven Purvis, Manager of Collaborative Programs, DFO provided an overview of the proposed objectives and elements of a renewed AAROM program based on commitments made in Budget 2017 and the outcomes of the Indigenous Program Review.

The presentation covered the four main objectives of the AAROM renewal, which are to:

1. Develop and maintain a new and strategic approach to funding enhancements to balance historical inequities, maintain a core platform with no reductions in historical funding with the goal to maintain robust AAROM departments (core platform/capacity)
2. Develop an AAROM Project fund to help improve and diversify AAROM specific project activities.
3. Develop and maintain an AAROM Network by supporting an annual National AAROM meeting and a AAROM marketing and partnership toolkit, which includes sharing and developing capacity as well as growing co-delivery capacity.
4. Promote access to other funding.

Objective 2, 3 and 4 were further elaborated on in the AAROM Project Fund and AAROM marketing and partnership toolkit sessions.

### Elders and Knowledge Keeper Panel

The purpose of the Elders and Knowledge keepers panel was to ensure ongoing discussions were grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and world views. Elder Albert Marshall, Eskasoni First Nation, Elder Mr. Henry McKay, Deninu K'ue First Nation, Elder Jonas Sangris, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, and Knowledge keeper Dr. Jeanette Armstrong spoke about ways in which Indigenous knowledge systems guide aquatic resource management and how it can complement western knowledge systems.

**Recommended Next Step:** This Elders and Knowledge keeper is important to ground discussion in Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. This should continue at future National AAROM meetings.

### AAROM as a Platform for Collaboration

Randy Angus, Director of Integrated Resources at the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI), and Aaron Heidt, Program Director at the Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance (CCIRA),

presented on various academic and government partnerships they have established using AAROM's core platform. Participants highlighted key elements required to form effective collaborations, which are:

- *Open communication*: all parties have clear roles, responsibilities and expectations (objectives, goals, and outcomes).
- *Mutual benefits/mutual respect*: all parties are able to contribute and benefit.
- *Consistency*: long-term commitments and employees, and consistent follow-up.
- *Adequate resources*: Funding for capacity development, training, databases, equipment etc.

Participants also listed key challenges they face in establishing effective partnerships, which are:

- *Intellectual property rights*: Impact organizations ability to share and protect Indigenous Knowledge.
- *Frequent staff turnover*: Federal Government and AAROM departments.
- *Lack of cultural awareness*: Non-Indigenous organizations' or the Federal Government's misunderstanding of Indigenous Knowledge and ways of life due to lack of awareness, cultural ignorance, or systemic racism.
- *Power imbalance*: AAROM departments and various levels of governments, where AAROM departments constantly react to proposed partnerships, rather than proactively propose projects.
- *Lack of funding/capacity*: majority of funding is competitive with narrow criteria that often does not align with communities priorities. Funding delays based on annual funding cycle requires AAROM departments to cash manage salaries and/or projects.
- *Lack of communication*: different interpretations of wording or what a partnership entails.
- *Different/opposing values*: partners have different goals and objectives that do not align with an AAROM department and their member Indigenous communities.

Participants were also asked to list key partners, which were their member Indigenous Governments and/or communities (community members, fish harvesters, Elders and knowledge keepers), other member Indigenous communities/organizations, and Federal government departments. Also, mentioned were non-governmental organizations and academia/research institutes.

Key federal departments listed were: Parks Canada, Environment Climate Change Canada (ECCC), Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Transport Canada (TC), Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs (CIRNA), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN).

Non-governmental organizations/charitable organizations listed were: Ecology North, Conservation Trust, Ducks unlimited, Fraser Basin Council, EcoTrust, Nature Conservancy, West Coast Aquatics.

**Recommended Next Step:** Co-develop guidance documents on building collaborative partnerships with AAROM departments to include in the AAROM marketing and partnership toolkit. The guidance documents can be accessible to external partners to both facilitate partnerships and promote AAROM as a platform. Also, the partial list of project partners can serve as a starting point for AAROM departments looking to diversify and build positive working relationships with other sectors.

### AAROM Operational Opportunities & Challenges

Howie Wright, Fisheries Program Manager at the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA), discussed how ONA was able to grow their fisheries department from an operational perspective, such as hiring a firm to develop a job classification system. Participants were then asked to prioritize their key operational challenges. The key recurring challenge throughout the entire meeting was human resources. AAROM

Directors frequently spoke about their struggles with staff retention, succession planning, hiring of qualified Indigenous biologist and technicians, access to training and mentorship programs, maintaining competitive wages and staff burn-out. They felt that establishing an AAROM network that enhances AAROM-to-AAROM department collaboration could help tackle some of these key issues as well as provide a unified voice to ensure consistent program delivery.

To see examples of various operational challenges AAROM departments have faced and the solutions they have used to overcome these challenges see Appendix A.

**Recommended Next Step:** Establish a Human Resource working group to begin tackling operational issues prior to the next National AAROM meeting. During the upcoming National AAROM meeting have a dedicated session to develop solutions to address human resource needs, such as succession planning.

### AAROM Project Fund Design

Participants had mixed feeling about the initial concept of an AAROM Project Fund. Participants were unhappy that the Project Fund deck had not been sent out in advance to allow for a more inclusive and fulsome discussion. A key concern was that funding enhancements to existing AAROM core agreements had not been negotiated; therefore, some Directors felt that it was premature to discuss a project fund prior to knowing what, if any, enhancements their AAROM department might receive. They also felt that the project fund would reduce the overall funds available for enhancements to existing core AAROM agreements. A general approach to funding enhancements was presented earlier in the day; however, due to time restrictions, there was limited time for a questions and answers, which impacted the discussion.

Some participants were concerned that the AAROM Project Fund would increase competitiveness between departments rather than increase collaboration. It was perceived that high capacity AAROM departments would receive funding, while low capacity departments would have a low chance of success. In contrast, some participants thought the AAROM Project Fund could help them leverage other funding from external partners. They also saw it as a potential fund to support Indigenous knowledge studies or collaborative economic development initiatives. Moving forward, participants noted that a flexible approach be taken to address communities and AAROM departments' needs and align with existing reporting structures to reduce the administrative burden.

An Indigenous caucus was held to allow for a more fulsome discussion among the AAROM Directors. Ken Paul, Director of Fisheries at the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) volunteered to work with AAROM directors after the meeting to receive further input and discussion. It was agreed that further feedback would be provided to DFO by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

**Recommended Next Step:** DFO will incorporate feedback received. Overall, ensure the AAROM Project Fund has notional amounts for regions and organizations. Also, ensure the application process is not overly cumbersome and does not increase the administrative burden on AAROM departments by allowing funding to flow through an existing AAROM contribution agreement via an amendment.

## Resource Sharing and Indigenous Procurement

Participants were interested in or already participating in resource sharing and Indigenous procurement. A lack of funding and capacity was identified as the major barrier to exploring these concepts. Overall, it was viewed as a positive long-term solution to expanding their services.

During the breakout sessions, participants identified potential barriers to consider prior to engaging in resource sharing or Indigenous procurement, which are:

- geographic location of AAROM departments;
- conflicting priorities;
- funding guidelines;
- lack of capacity and funding;
- lack of interest from other AAROM departments; and,
- not viewing other AAROM departments as service providers.

Participants also provided possible solutions to overcome these barriers, which are:

- government departments source AAROMs departments for contract work;
- hire key staff to engage in Indigenous procurement;
- create a national fund for resource sharing and Indigenous procurement projects;
- interested AAROM departments advertise their needs and services;
- align with economic development opportunities, i.e. fisheries;
- develop opportunities outside AAROM departments to bid on contracts;
- AAROM to AAROM mentorship/exchanges; and,
- a business matching workshop at the National AAROM meeting (e.g. speed dating model).

**Recommended Next Step:** Focus on the concept of Indigenous procurement at the next National AAROM meeting, with a dedicated session or workshop. AAROM Project Fund and the AAROM marketing and partnership toolkit can explore opportunities for Indigenous procurement and resource sharing.

## AAROM Marketing and Partnership Toolkit

Erika Perrier, Senior Program Officer, DFO presented the initial concept for an AAROM marketing and partnership toolkit as a web-based platform, hosted and maintained by an Indigenous organization, and co-designed and co-developed with AAROM departments. Participants felt that a toolkit could benefit them in their day to day activities and would merit separate sections for AAROM departments and external partners. They would like to explore this topic further at the next National AAROM meeting to ensure ongoing co-design and co-development is practical in nature and addresses their realities.

It was suggested that the toolkit co-design be led by a Steering Committee that engages with AAROM departments via multiple channels. The Steering Committee should include:

- range of perspectives, including representatives from different regions
- established guidelines for approving final content
- engage with broader network via surveys, bi-laterals, focus groups, engagement sessions etc.
- ensure AAROM program brand does not detract from AAROM departments' brands
- ensure toolkit is provided adequate resources

Participants began brainstorming potential subject matter for the toolkit but emphasized that it is practical and help AAROM departments in their day to day activities. The potential subject matter includes:

- AAROM-to-AAROM networking;
- promote AAROMs department services;
- map of all AAROM departments with links to their websites;
- resource hub to share information;
- human resource management support;
- funding portal;
- inventory (trained Indigenous technicians and biologist for hire; service expertise for resource sharing (i.e. GIS and mapping); training opportunities; and equipment);
- list of different project concepts;
- available safety protocols and processes; and,
- information on liability insurance.

**Recommended Next Step:** Move forward on co-design elements by creating a Steering Committee and develop a map of all AAROM departments before the next National AAROM meeting. Ensure next National AAROM meeting has a dedicated session to workshop the toolkit.

#### NATIONAL AAROM MEETING – NEXT STEPS

The next National AAROM meeting will be hosted by the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI) and is tentatively scheduled for November 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019 in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The timing was changed based on feedback from the SC to better align the meeting with the annual planning cycle. There was support to continue the National AAROM meeting and formalize this process to help enhance the AAROM network. Overall, participants felt that the meeting is an effective way of sharing knowledge and best practices, and establishing joint projects.

#### **Recommended Next Step:**

- continue with the National AAROM meeting Steering Committee
- expand the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee to ensure a formalized terms of reference and a designated Indigenous Co-Chair.
- increase the meeting timeframe to two full days to ensure fulsome discussions.
- key topics for discussion are: human resources; Indigenous procurement; AAROM marketing and partnership toolkit; regional differences and similarities.
- decrease paper handouts by providing an electronic version via USB or a Dropbox;
- distribute meeting material in advance;
- improve layout of meeting space;
- increase DFO communication internally about the meeting purpose and objectives;
- decrease presentations and increase action-oriented sessions;
- explore options for youth participation;
- invite other Federal/Provincial/Territorial Departments as needed;
- continue with the Elder and Knowledge holder panel at next National AAROM meeting; and
- explore options for using different technologies such as live streaming and Slido to increase participation and outreach.



## Appendix A

Examples of operational challenges AAROM departments have face and the solutions they have used to overcome them.

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
Inadequate funding with narrow funding criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generating own source revenues.</li> <li>• Diversified sources of incomes through various departments services providers.</li> </ul>
Funding delays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing face to face meetings to address delays in funding with departments.</li> </ul>
Building credibility with member Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on needs of community and creating opportunities for educated youth by creating Education Coordinators and accessing Summer Student programs.</li> <li>• Regularly reporting to leadership on key activities and seeking guidance.</li> <li>• Indigenous communities came together to form a governance structure that allowed for a vehicle to establish an Indigenous based resourcing plan.</li> </ul>
DFO Staff Turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To overcome DFO's high staff turnover and constant reeducation of staff on Indigenous organizations a group developed a document describing what communities and organizations are within the Nation's governance structure.</li> </ul>
Conflicting priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face to face meeting between AAROM departments and DFO crucial to working on Joint technical working groups, which solved back and forth letter writing. It also assisted with planning activities to help align priorities to ensure mutual benefit.</li> <li>• Working together helped build a mutual understanding of inter-governmental relations between different departments. As an example, an organization was able to overcome ignorant language in an IFMP by writing the section that described herring's value to Indigenous Peoples.</li> </ul>
Staff turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning work on succession planning and establishing better work conditions helped organization find and retain qualified staff.</li> </ul>
Lack of qualified staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased partnership and collaboration.</li> </ul>
Lack of Communication between DFO NHQ, RHQ, and AAROMs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcome through sending an email to all AAROM Directors.</li> </ul>
AAROM research not being used in DFO science assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AAROM groups began working with all areas of DFO which resulted in their research being more widely used.</li> </ul>