

Our History

The Concept

The Maritimes and Gulf regions have been discussing the concept of establishing a “Professionalization” program for over 20 years. Many industry leaders were exposed to the concept by Fisheries and Oceans Canada under the leadership of the Hon. Bernard Valcourt in the early 90’s. During this time Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) had decided to get out of the business of registering fishermen and wanted to turn over this responsibility to a recognized industry body in a province or region. This body would collect the Personal Fishing Registrations (PFR’s) and use these funds to help offset training costs, work on developing training tools, and deal with training issues affecting fishermen in today’s environment and the future. DFO made a commitment in the late 90’s and early 2000 to other regions and had withdrawn from the registration system in Newfoundland and Quebec.

In 1991, industry groups in the Maritimes region were invited to the table by DFO to discuss administering the registration system. This gave industry an opportunity to discuss the concept and determine if they wanted to incorporate a Professionalization program in the region or not. Some consultation was done at the community and association level. Due to the diversity of the region, industry soon realized that this issue was very complex and extensive consultation would be needed. We were also competing against other issues that were priorities to fishermen at the time so this item lost attention.

Coming Together

In 1999, industry took the lead on the initiative and asked the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council to facilitate. The NSFSC is a non-profit organization who represents the harvesting, processing and aquaculture sectors in Nova Scotia on human resources and training issues. The NSFSC has extensive experience in training coordination, training development, and overall capacity building in the industry. The NSFSC worked in partnership with the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters (CCPFH) to link in to national initiatives for the betterment of fish harvesters in Nova Scotia. A workshop was held with industry in 2001 as a way to move things forward and bring associations together. All associations in the region were asked to participate. The result of this workshop was the formation of an interim board and working group that encompassed all fleet sectors (offshore, mid-shore, in-shore and inter-tidal) and geographical areas. A mandate to move forward was given. These bodies would work towards developing a program and gauging the level of support at the wharf level. One issue that was identified was that there was a fear by industry that the concept of “Professionalization” was that “someone” was going to come in and do something to you. That fear of change made it more difficult to “sell” the concept with fishermen, so the working group and interim board needed to be very clear in their messaging that

Professionalization is the Recognition of Fishermen. That was step one. Step two would be to improve capacity at the wharf level once they were in the system.

Validating the Concept

Communication can be a challenge with the fishing industry as it is sometimes difficult to reach everyone. Industry is much more accessible when it's a "hot topic". The professionalization program, although beneficial to the industry, was difficult to get fishermen engaged on the subject. Capacity challenges were also an issue as a large portion of PFR holders are not represented by an association and work independently. The interim board wanted a process that could potentially reach everyone.

A strategy was put forward to effectively inform all PFR holders in the region. It was determined that various methods of promotion would be used. These methods were in the form of brochures, newsletters, commercials, press releases, website and presentations to various fishermen's associations and forums. The interim board and working group also participated in national events that gave opportunity to network with other regions and learn from their experiences and their approach to the program. This group also started to work together to represent the region on items such as providing input into Transport Canada training and certification requirements, and working with DFO to develop a policy framework for professionalization, regulatory changes and PFR transfer to an industry led system.

After extensive consultation with industry from **2001-2004** the interim board and working group were better positioned to define professionalization in the region and what it would mean to fishermen at the wharf level.

An industry conference was held in **2004** which was well attended by over 60 participants. A report was generated from this session. As a result of this conference the interim board and working group were mandated to develop consultation strategies, develop governance structures and prepared for a vote with all PFR holders.

In the fall of **2004**, the Interim Board and working group conducted consultation sessions across the region. All PFR holders were invited to attend. A total of 15 sessions were held. The benefits of developing a professionalization program were communicated to those that attended, along with addressing some of the myths that may be floating around. A "what was said" report was generated that brought out many common themes. The following items were identified – the need for a body to provide input into training standards, the need for awareness around training requirements, resources similar to the past (NS Fisheries RITC – now NS Fisheries Sector Council) to help support training costs and a concern that if fishermen don't take control over our own industry when it comes to training, someone else will. The consultation sessions were a good exercise in identifying that they needed to raise the level of interest and awareness at the wharf level and they needed to determine how to engage fishermen on the subject.

In 2005 a conference was held with industry associations across the region. This conference was attended by over 50 fishermen/fishermen's representatives. A strong message was sent at this session that there was too much gray area around the word "Professionalization" and the region should be clearly stating what they are doing so there isn't confusion at the wharf level. A name change was made to the Scotia Fundy Professional Fishermen's Registration and Training Interim Board (Interim was dropped in 2009 when the board formally registered). The new name provided a clearer focus for the group and promotional work was executed in order to lead into a vote.

Between the period of **2005 – 2006** all Personal Fishing Registration holders had an opportunity to vote on whether or not they would like to see a registration and training system in place for the Maritimes region. This mail in ballot, which was conducted in partnership with the NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture returned 56% support for moving forward with the initiative. The results were accepted by the interim board and a strategy to move forward was put in place. Support was also given by DFO Regional office, along with NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and NB Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries.

Building a Plan

In 2007, the Scotia Fundy Professionalization Interim Board was directed by DFO Ottawa to prepare a business plan/proposal which would follow along with DFO's policy framework for professionalization. This plan was developed and vetted through industry for their support. DFO regional office, along with Provincial fisheries in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also gave their support to the process by participating in the development of the plan/proposal. Letters of support were also secured from various partners in order to strengthen the proposal.

The working group and regional DFO made the presentation of the proposal to DFO Ottawa staff which outlined the contents of the business plan and their intentions for industry to implement a professionalization regime in the region. DFO Ottawa staff was supportive of the approach and were accepting of the business plan. The pitch was made that with new emerging initiatives such as Ocean to Plate, Eco-labeling, Safety at Sea (DFO and Transport Canada's MOU) and new training and certification requirements published by Transport Canada, the industry more than ever before needed to have the capacity to be responsive. Labour shortages were on the horizon as well and industry was up to the task to address these items.

Putting Concepts in Motion

As things were left in limbo and issues continued to emerge for industry, the interim board needed to step up and take charge. It was intended that a "professionalization" regime

would be put in place by this time and industry would have the support to register and train fishermen at this point. Industry had to find a strategic way to forge ahead and find resources to improve the capacity of fishermen at the wharf level. How could a body increase awareness and knowledge at the wharf level on topics that impacted their livelihood was a question the interim board asked. So was put forward the concept of the Network Coordinator Program.

Over the period of 2009-10 the interim board formalized (Scotia Fundy Professional Fishermen's Registration and Training Association) and were able to secure funds from ACOA to start the Network Coordinator Program. ACOA required other funding sources. Funding was secured from the Provinces of NS and NB, along with DFO in order to make this project happen. The areas of focus for the coordinators were around training and certification, quality handling practices, eco-certification, safety at sea and governance/structure. The first year the program broke the region up into zones and had 7 Network Coordinators. These coordinators all had some form of background in the fishery, or were attached to a fishermen's organization. Some professional development was conducted with the coordinators on the topics presented so that there was a consistent message going out to fishermen. The coordinators also had the opportunity to sell the concept of "professionalization" with fishermen. This extended the reach to the wharf level and fishermen were very supportive in seeing something in place. The network coordinators would use various methods such as one on one, independent workshops, attend existing meetings, print materials, in order to communicate the topics put forward. These methods all came together to improve capacity at the wharf level, to help foster a training and safety culture in the industry and improve the image of the industry. These coordinators began to be seen as the "go to" person in the area and fishermen started to reach out to them as a resource. They were the navigator for a number of departments such as Transport Canada, NS Department of Labour, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, etc and helped fishermen to improve knowledge on topics that could grow their enterprise. Program support was given by the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council. Their role was in the form of providing a Program Director and assisted in financially supporting the program.

Funding from ACOA came to an end in March 31, 2011, and due to the success of the program and the momentum that was built there was interest to explore options to keep the program going. An opportunity to secure funds from the Atlantic Lobster Sustainability Measures program was available and the SFPFRTA was successful in securing funds until March 31 2014. Since this wasn't 100% funding there was a requirement to secure other sources of funding. Sources were secured from both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to cover the remaining balance to effectively run the program. 6 coordinators were secured (same coordinators as in previous program), which aligned to the LFA's in the region. The Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council also continued to provide program support. In total this program allowed the Network Coordinators to engage with over 18,000 fishermen (some more than once) and coordinated a total of 436 presentations/sessions. The program maintained the same topics (Training and certification, quality handling practices, eco-certification, safety at sea and governance/structure), along with some enhancements to help address

topics that were of concern to fishermen. The program also was able to secure funds from the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education to help support training of fish harvesters (1200+). The training programs that were supported were in relation to helping fishermen obtain the necessary certification to retain employment in the industry. These programs increased the level of compliance in the industry for regulatory training.

Over the period of 2011 – 2014 a very successful Network Coordinator program was delivered. The Network Coordinators used various delivery methods of one-on one meetings, workshops, and outreach sessions, participate in existing meetings or in print form in order to provide relevant information to fishermen. In conjunction with the various meeting held the Network Coordinators also assisted industry to obtain training in their respective field of work. Funding was no longer available to these fishermen, so they are responsible to cover the cost. Having this opportunity to engage fishermen in this manner provided an opportunity to showcase the importance of training, along with increasing capacity and knowledge. The Network Coordinators were also leaders in organizing outreach sessions for fishermen in relation to training and certification requirements. This gave opportunity to assess training needs of fishermen.

The Network Coordinators also partnered with the Lobster Council of Canada and the Nova Scotia Fish Packers Association to host Quality Handling Practices workshops throughout the region. This gave opportunity to engage fishermen in discussions around the value in proper handling practices and maximizing product value.

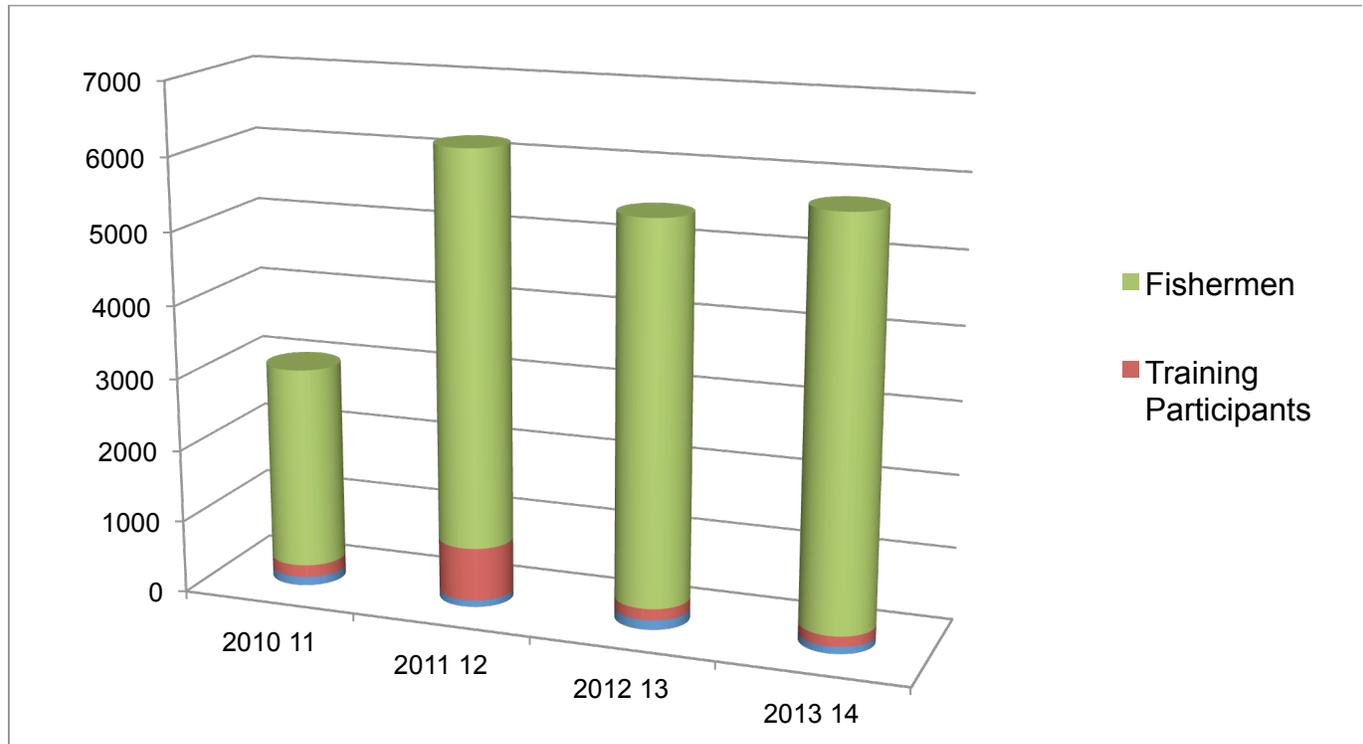
The program also had opportunity to assist harvesters in enhancing governance by assisting in organizing sessions with LFA's that are not formally organized at the present time. This proved to be a beneficial exercise and has shown the value of organization.

Safety at sea was also a strong focus and the Network Coordinators assisted the industry in increasing awareness of safety equipment requirements and safety practices. Man overboard drills were conducted with fishermen, which gave opportunity to open dialogue on the importance of safety as part of the day to day practices of fishing.

The program also offered the opportunity to be responsive to industry needs by providing support to fishermen in relation to the new online licencing program, by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. It was identified that fishermen found the new system challenging and support was (and continues to be) needed within the industry. Outreach sessions were conducted by the Network Coordinators. These sessions help to increase awareness of the requirement, along with some training on how to navigate the system. These activities all help to improve essential skills and foster a training culture.

The uptake and achievements of the program exceeded the expectations. The foundation items that the program started off with continued on and new items emerge. Fishermen need a body to be responsive and help to educate and improve capacity at the wharf level. It was

proven that direct communication; at the wharf level is what works in this industry. Having the ability to do that through this program has advanced the knowledge and capacity of the industry. Lessons Learned - Helping one fisherman at a time is the only way to go.



Gulf of Nova Scotia

The Gulf region was also introduced to the concept of “Professionalization” during the same time the Maritimes region was. Their activities were similar in nature as industry tried to collectively come together to explore the option of implementing a program. Three provinces came together and set up structure and delivered communication and consultation to fishermen. The region also worked closely with the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters to move the initiative forward.

In 2004 the Gulf of Nova Scotia group gained support by hosting communities meetings around the area. All sessions were well attended. Professionalization was given a strong mandate with 52% (340) of the eligible core fish harvesters (662) voting. The provincial government hired a consultant to conduct and oversee the voting process. The ballot count was held on April 19th, 2004. The results were 68% in favor and 29% opposed with 3% spoiled ballots. The process was stalled when DFO Gulf (for reasons not yet clear) removed their support. The support for moving forward by industry is still there, just put on hold for the time being.

Implementing a Legislative Framework

Both regions in Nova Scotia (Maritimes and Gulf) were disappointed that things didn't materialize in the manner they should have. Both groups were disappointed that other regions had implemented it already and they hadn't. Votes were taken in both regions with favorable results, and issues were still building that needed addressing. It was communicated to the Maritimes region that they needed something to strengthen their case which was consistent to other provinces – i.e. legislation.

The Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA) felt the struggles of the groups in moving “professionalization” forward. Feedback given to the department by industry was that there was a level of disappointment that things hadn't materialized yet. In 2011, NSDFA presented the concept of establishing legislation that would support the efforts in Nova Scotia. The intention of the legislation was to have it be enabling and to allow the regions to do what it intends to do – registration and training. It would also strengthen industry's efforts and put them in line with the other provinces that have already established.

In order to move the concept forward a working group was established with representatives from both the Maritimes and Gulf region in Nova Scotia, along with NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (sponsoring department). Representatives from DFO (both regions), along with industry reps in New Brunswick (Maritimes and Gulf) were invited to participate. Coordination for this work was completed by the Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council. In 2011 the working group focused its efforts on developing legislation that best suited industry in Nova Scotia. They validated the concepts put forward by hosting an industry conference in early 2012. Support was given by industry at this session. The Fish Harvesters Registration and Certification Board Act was then introduced in the legislature during the spring session. The act received royal assent on May 17th, 2012. It clearly states that the Act gives authority to establish a board that will register and certify fishermen. Once the Act was passed, the working group was then tasked to develop by-laws and governance policies that would speak to the Act. These concepts were presented to industry during a one-day workshop in 2013 for feedback and support. These documents were finalized by the working group and a final validation session was held with industry in March 2014. The focus of this session was to share with the group what the program would look like and how it could best serve the industry in Nova Scotia to move forward the concept of a professionalization program. Industry groups accepted what was put forward at the session and a motion was made to move forward, establish the board and prepare a proposal to Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Once the act was established the working group focused on the development of a proposal for Fisheries and Oceans Canada. By-laws and governance polices were developed to support the proposal as well. This package was presented to the Nova Scotia Minister of Fisheries

and Aquaculture for his support, which was received in **June 2015**. From there, the proposal was submitted to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for her support. It wasn't until **August 2016** that a response was received that the department that the Minister supported the proposal in principal and suggested we work collaboratively over the next 24 months towards a more detailed negotiation of the proposal's content and implementation plan. The Minister also instructed DFO to begin the process necessary to amend registration requirements in relevant federal regulations (will include industry consultation).