

# *SUMMARY REPORT*

## Fostering Consensus in Collaborative Fisheries Management: Case studies to inform implementation of the Fisheries Resources Reconciliation Agreement (FRRRA)

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# Introduction

The Fisheries Resources Reconciliation Agreement (FRRRA), signed in July 2021, is a landmark agreement between eight Nations of the North and Central coast of British Columbia (B.C.) – Gitxaala, Metlakatla, Gitga’at, KITASOO Xai’xais, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Wuikinuxv, Council of Haida Nation – as well as the Great Bear Initiative Society and the Government of Canada. The FRRRA’s two main pillars are: economic access, in the form of unique community-based fisheries (CBFs) in the Nations’ territories, as well as coastwide commercial access; and collaborative governance, with consensus-oriented Nation-Crown councils to address decision-making at local and regional scales along the coast. The FRRRA commits the parties to work collaboratively on a “Nation-to-Nation, government-to-government basis in a cooperative and respectful manner [...] and the Parties intend that this Agreement will support transformative change.” (FRRRA, p. 2, 2021). Three years into the implementation of the FRRRA, though, critical challenges remain. CBFs have slowly rolled out over three seasons, with significant challenges in expansion to what was originally envisioned. On a more strategic level, while the FRRRA calls for consensus-based recommendations and dispute resolution processes, no formal decision-making process has been defined, leaving actors within the process to learn by doing.

## Purpose

This research examines eight case studies of Nation-Crown collaborative Governance Canada, to provide guidance for the FRRRA consensus-building processes. Through interviews with key informants from both the Nation and Crown sides of each case, we identified good practices and challenges from these case studies. Here we present ‘good practices’ to highlight how to improve upon past decision-making Processes. There is still much learning needed to create a framework for the ideal process.



*Collaborative governance:  
engaging in collective  
decision-making*



# What we did

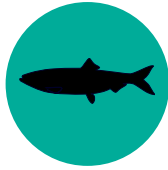
Guided by the Senior Working Group (SWG) of the FRRR, we carried out interviews to gain insights into the good practices and challenges of reaching consensus in practice. The team collaboratively developed interview questions. For each case, we interviewed at least one representative of the Crown and one representative of the Nation. Interviews typically lasted one hour and most were conducted over video-call, recorded, transcribed, and checked by interviewees. Interviews followed University of Victoria's human research ethics protocols (#25-0138). Interviews included questions on the key aspects of the case study; problem definition and scope of the process; consensus recommendations and how they were reached; decisions; outcomes; and the role of actors in the case. We analyzed the transcripts for emergent themes using the coding software NVivo.

## Cases



### Central Coast Crab Collaborative Management Process

2017 – Present. Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance (Kitasoo Xai'xais, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Wuikinuxv Nations), DFO



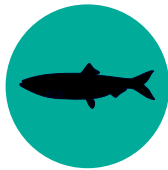
### Heiltsuk Herring Joint Management Plan

2015 – Present (inactive – no commercial herring fishery). DFO and Heiltsuk Nation



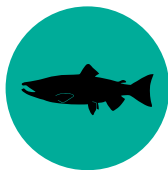
### DFO-Haida Razor Clam Joint Management Plan

1994 – Present. DFO and Council of Haida Nation



### Haida Gwaii Pacific Herring Rebuilding Plan

2024 – Present. DFO, Parks Canada, Council of the Haida Nation, Archipelago Management Board



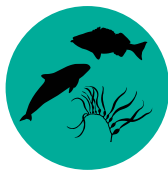
### Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee

1993 – Present. Government of Canada, Government of Yukon, 11 Yukon First Nations



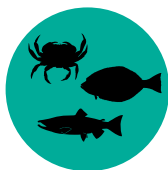
### Great Bear Rainforest Agreements & Reconciliation Protocols

2009 – Present. Coastal First Nations and Ṉanwaḵolas Council, Government of B.C.



### Marine Protected Area Network and Action Plan

2023 – Present. Canada, British Columbia, and 15 Nations in the Northern Shelf Bioregion




### FRRR Community-Based Fisheries, 2025 Season

2021 – Present. DFO, eight coastal First Nations, Great Bear Initiative Society

# Summary of findings


We conducted eighteen interviews with key actors who either currently worked for or had worked in the past for a Crown government department or agency (n = 10), or a Nation organization (n = 8), involved in a case study. Key themes are shown below, illustrating helpful and unhelpful practices, attitudes, and behaviours.

HELPFUL




### PROBLEM DEFINITION AND SCOPE

- Agreement on problem and solution
- Issue can be addressed within process




### CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clear decision criteria
- Respect for Indigenous Knowledge and science
- Consensus at multiple levels
- Outcomes effective and appreciated



### COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

- Capacity - funding, staff, time
- Strong relationships
- Collaborative stakeholder engagement
- Strategic alignment - vision, definitions, comms
- Structures - regular meetings, ToR, escalation



### ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS


- Prepared, empowered, and supported staff
- Honesty
- Commitment to collaboration
- Strong leadership
- Personal relationships

UNHELPFUL



### COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

- Capacity issues
- Relationship issues
- Strategic issues
- Structural issues
- Unwillingness to collaborate
- Stakeholder engagement issues
- Legislation, policy, and jurisdictional challenges



### ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

- Unwilling to escalate
- Lack of commitment to collaboration
- Staff turnover
- Personal toll on self and relationships

# General recommendations

We identified a number of specific challenges, along with the good practices to address them, that are directly relevant for the FRRRA. These general recommendations are summarized in the figure below.



*It's going to require agreement on the underlying science and information. And that's a critically important step, because often there is disagreement at that level.*



*There's a lot to be desired in the tone and the approach [...] it feels like every step that we make is hard fought [...] We have a huge mismatch of scope and success.*

# Specific recommendations



## MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Check in regularly to ensure mutual understanding of collaborative governance; specific goals and objectives; agree on the problem you are addressing; what consensus means. Identify points of connection and disagreement.



## PROCESS DIAGRAM OF HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

Develop a process diagram of how / where decisions are made, what criteria are used to guide/make decisions, how things move up the chain and/or back down; include what the end-goal is (i.e., decision-making or recommendations).



## GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Develop a guidance document that includes making legislative and regulatory requirements really clear; identify relevant policies.



## REGULAR IN-PERSON MEETINGS

Hold regular, in-person meetings, even when there are not issues arising or active fisheries happening.



## REGULAR BRIEFING-UP

Develop regular briefing-up through collaborative (i.e., co-written, agreed to by both parties) briefing notes/memos with common messaging; build support from senior levels.



## PEOPLE WHO WORK FOR ALL PARTIES

Put people in place who work for all parties; "you've got to have somebody who can work and build relationships with both sides" (FN 5); neutral people who have a reporting structure, such as a secretariat with trusted membership from the parties.



## THOROUGH ON-BOARDING PROCESS

Develop a thorough on-boarding process for new staff, including context, history, rationale, meaning of collaborative governance, expectations, when/how to escalate issues, cultural safety, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, etc.



## STRATEGIC FOCUS

Given that there will never be enough capacity, be strategic about what to focus on. It helps to have a small core group of people (2-3) who have a good handle on the political and legal landscape. Find ways to be more efficient/less bureaucratic.



## DOCUMENT SUCCESSES

Document achievements and successes so that these can serve as models for when future issues arise and for other related processes. "The more we can point to success, the more we can replicate" (GOV 9).



## GO BEYOND SAYING NO

"You can't just say no" (GOV 2): Develop a process for going beyond saying "no". Be transparent about what the key issues are so creative ways of moving forward can be found. Show up in good faith.



## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE CHANGE

"The more we can support culture change within the federal bureaucracy, the better" (GOV 9). Develop foundational tools to educate staff at all levels about the commitments; could include learning exchanges, lunch and learn with First Nations.

# Conclusion

Capacity was the single most widely acknowledged challenge addressed by the interviewees of this study. The findings also made clear that limited numbers of people may be less important than having consistent, dedicated people that are willing and able to make decisions and creatively solve problems in forum or raise issues efficiently to those who can. This is where it is the responsibility of leadership from each side to make clear what they are committing to and prioritizing in this agreement, to provide training and support for new staff to be effective in their role while prioritizing the current dedicated staff working on the process. At the agreement level, this can also be supported by clear structural processes that enable actors to escalate from the technical to managerial levels when necessary to resolve issues in a timely manner.

Acknowledging the bigger picture policy challenges and work required to change them is critical not only for understanding, but also for building honest relationships between the parties as progress unfolds. Trust has consistently been recognized as a critical element of collaborative partnership, and with honesty as the essential building block. When big issues like capacity, legislation, and constitutional powers can't be shifted, it's critical for the parties and the actors involved on each side to be very clear and open about those challenges and the uncertainties associated with them. Recognizing the problem that exists and choosing to work on addressing it together is so much more collaborative and powerful than saying, "That's not possible." Transformation might need to be incremental and long-term, but it is still transformation – the status quo cannot be maintained with transformative agreements moving forward, and indeed, they should not be. Commitment to reconciliation inherently requires transformation from the colonial structures that have been the status quo until today.



*We all agree that the process did not work. It was way too hard, and we can't keep going this way. We need to make it smoother and easier and less time restrictive, for sure.*





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