

Aboriginal Fisheries

Getting it right

There are 34 or so Aboriginal Bands in Atlantic Canada. The performance of these Bands is very uneven.

Pictou Landing Band (PLFN) is by any measure the most successful. In terms of participation, employment and revenue they are head and shoulders above the rest.

Why is this? Well PLFN has had a number of Commercial License holders in the Band for at least three generations. That led to the development of a fishing culture within the Band. Owner-operator Captains hired Band members as crewmen for years and thus developed a cadre of capable, trained personnel once Marshall had expanded the rights of Aboriginals.

Post Marshall PLFN negotiated for and received 13 Fishing enterprises in the Band's area of operations. These enterprises were purchased from retiring non-indigenous operators so that effort was replaced by the Band and not added into a fully subscribed fishery.

The PLFN had in place one Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy license and with the 13 new acquisitions gave the PLFN 14 Lobster (and mixed fisheries opportunities). This does not count the half dozen or so privately held licenses by Band members.

PLFN Captained and crewed all 14 operations. In addition they had a couple of vessels working the Area 19 Transferable Trap Snow Crab fishery. These operations were likewise conducted by Band members.

PLFN Chiefs and Councils wisely used profits from, in particular the Snow Crab operations, to purchase further enterprises from the existing fleets. PLFN purchased several Snow Crab and Lobster enterprises adjacent to Area 19 crab zone.

At present PLFN has 19 or 20 lobster licenses and a large share of the Area 19 Snow Crab fishery.

How has it worked out?

In Snow crab PLFN holds 154 Trap shares (out of a total of 1699 trap shares). Two other Bands have about 3% between them.

Based on quota and prices over the past three years PLFN produced significant results.

In 2018 revenue was ...\$2,447,676.00

In 2019 revenue was....\$3,088,681.00

In 2020 revenue was....\$2,068,210.00

Revenue in 2020 was lower for all participants due to reduced TAC and reduced prices as a result of Covid.

Over the past three years it is much more difficult to nail down Lobster revenues as there is no quota and I can only surmise the landings of the 20 or so PLFN vessels.

It is safe to say that if PLFN vessels worked at the average in the area they would have net something like \$150,000.00 per vessel over each of the past three years.

Assuming the PLFN boats performed at the average that comes to at least \$150,000.00 per vessel or another \$3,000,000.00 total gross revenue per annum.

Of course these estimates are of gross revenue and profits will be somewhat lower as it is for all fishing operations.

PLFN has 875 members on and off reserve. This is a spectacular success brought about in large measure by good fiscal management by PLFN coupled with a committed and experienced workforce

I assume the Band reaps a fair share of the revenue from Snow Crab as a communal input. The Band members, Captains and crewmen, I am sure reap most of the benefit from the lobster operations. So in addition to earning, these fishermen qualify for EI as do most Commercial non-indigenous fishermen. This total income stream greatly reduces any Band welfare requirements as they have so many persons gainfully employed. This is a huge benefit to the Band at large.

I have to admit that my findings are somewhat speculative, less so in Crab than Lobster, but I think the assessment is accurate.

There is a great lesson in this for the other Bands who struggle with revenue and employment leading to numerous Band licenses being leased out to non-Indigenous operators.

PLFN is to be commended for their success and their good working relationship with other commercial fishermen. If that relationship is eroded by recent activities by some Bands it would be a great tragedy.

Stuart Beaton