

Saskatchewan Commercial Fishing Industry

Sector Partnership Human Resource & Training Needs Assessment Study

July, 2001



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

The commercial fishing industry is a vital part of the Northern economy of Saskatchewan. It is estimated that the direct value of the industry in Saskatchewan is 5.2 million dollars. This industry represents a major contribution to the economy of northern communities where high unemployment results in social and economic hardship to the residents. There are 35 communities in the north where commercial fishers reside and whose primary source of income is from commercial fishing. In many of these communities this is the largest and sometimes the only sector outside of the public service where people are employed.

The industry has a long history in the province and at one time contributed greatly to the economy. For many reasons, including: less localized processing plants; changes in demand for fish by consumers and prices paid to fishermen; to name a few, there has been a steady decline, to a point that today the industry is in threat of disappearing. A recent major economic development study which examined the commercial fishing industry in Saskatchewan revealed that by overcoming a number of barriers there is a significant opportunity to increase production and to undertake processing operations particularly for the underutilized species of our lakes and rivers.

As a result of these opportunities and the past difficulties the Saskatchewan Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Federation Limited (SCFCFL) approached Trimension Training & Consulting Group Inc. and Spruce River Research to develop and submit a concept proposal to Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Sector Partnership Program to sponsor a study of the human resource and training needs of the commercial fishing industry in Saskatchewan.

The industry has, over the past number of years, had difficulty with a skill shortage of adequately trained fishers, helpers, packing plant workers and process workers, along with limited support for developing and enhancing the twenty-nine (29) fishermen's co-operatives and one (1) association operating in the province. Human resource development and upgrading, particularly for the fishers, is critical for the industry's longer term development and expansion.

The SCFCFL recognizes that it has to assume a greater responsibility to its member co-operatives and their members for training and human resource decisions to the industry and other stakeholders who are closest to the labour market.

The SCFCFL believes it will benefit by taking responsibility for identifying and addressing its own human resource and training needs. They, along with their partners such as Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC), Saskatchewan Northern Affairs (SNA) and Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management (SERM), can work with and improve the training system for the benefit of existing and prospective employers and employees.

This study was initiated on behalf of the Commercial Fishing Industry Sector Partnership which views the human resource and training needs of its fishers and employees as critical for the

sustainability and growth of the industry in Saskatchewan. This study was sponsored by the Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Sector Partnerships Program.

Methodology

This report addresses the human resources and training needs of the commercial fishing industry of Saskatchewan. It summarizes the major findings from research undertaken and the recommendations developed by the Sector Partnership Steering Committee.

The methodology included a research program throughout the industry:

- a documentation/literature review of relevant previous studies and reports;
- a review of data collected on the various Fishermen's Co-operatives operating in Saskatchewan;
- an extensive interview program with key representatives of the fishermen's Co-operatives, training institutions, government departments, related stakeholders and fishers, in all over fifty (50) interviews were conducted throughout the province;
- discussion sessions with fishers, co-operative board members and the Sector Partnership Steering Committee members;
- interviews with key individuals representing Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation;
- validation and input from members of the Steering Committee, both individually and in meetings.

Literature Review

A literature review was completed with the objective of providing the Steering Committee with background information necessary to establish a base for the human resource and training needs assessment. The information for the literature review was obtained from various sources including published and unpublished reports.

Education and Training Database

Research was conducted to develop and compile a database of education and training programs for the Saskatchewan Commercial Fishing industry. A review of existing relevant training courses were researched through the examination of institution calendars and the internet. The research focused on only those programs and courses that would apply to the freshwater fishing industry. The results show there are no programs that are directly applicable to fresh water fish, however some courses exist that are applicable or could be adapted to fresh water fish. This confirms the need to become more involved in new course development.

Key Findings

The following summarizes the key findings from the research and consultations that have taken place over the course of the study of the Human Resource and Training Needs of the Commercial Fishing industry in Saskatchewan.

Workforce Profile

- The number of commercial fishers selling to FFMC over the past ten (10) years has remained relevantly stable;
- Eighty-two (82) percent of the people working in this industry are of Aboriginal ancestry;
- It is estimated that 84% of the people working are male;
- A very small percentage, approximately only 9%, of the workforce is under the age of 24 while just over 45% are 45 years of age and older; and
- Sixty-seven (67) percent of the workforce have some high school education.

Recruitment and Retention

- Employers have said it is difficult to find skilled and knowledgeable workers;
- Word of mouth and networking through family members have been the main methods of recruiting workers;
- The seasonality of the work, low wages (\$5,818 per person in 1998/99) and the manual work involved were cited by employers as the three main barriers to both the recruitment and retention of employees;
- The research found that the availability of other job opportunities in other sectors that are now operating in their or near their home communities is the cause of people not wanting to enter the industry.

Training

- The industry has gone through a number of years where no training has been made available for the workers;
- There is no institutional or work-based training offered in the province;
- Every occupation or job in the industry requires some form of training and upgrading;
- On-the-job training was the most commonly selected delivery option;
- Training is recognized as a necessity if the industry is going to be revitalized.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed by the Commercial Fishing Industry Sector Partnership Steering Committee based on the results of the research, the consultation process and the experience and expertise of the members themselves. The Steering Committee will be responsible to lead and direct the implementation of these recommendations in partnership with their stakeholder representatives.

Comprehensive Training Initiative

Recommendation:

The Sector Partnership Steering Committee will work with education and training providers to develop a comprehensive training initiative to address all aspects of the industry from harvesting to shipping for processing.

Strategies

- Training fishers to take proper care of their catch from the time it leaves the water till it is delivered to the plant.
- On-the-job training of plant workers in both hand filleting and mechanized filleting machine operation for processing the fish.
- Training on-the-job of the proper grading and packing of fish by the plant workers to be export ready.
- Undertaking a comprehensive study on the type of training that is needed in order to be Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) compliant.
- Training regarding the requirements of inspection agency systems locally and abroad and the implementation of on-going inspection.
- Develop and deliver training on the principles of a co-operative in order to facilitate and operate well organized and well run co-operatives at the Board and membership levels.
- Deliver the training within or as close as effectively possible to the respective communities where fishers, plant workers and co-operatives reside to reduce the cost and eliminate the need to travel out of the community. Training to be delivered at a time convenient to the industry.
- Arrange and meet with the various training and employment agencies to discuss those programs which can assist the hiring of workers and enable them to make the transition in the workforce.
- Prepare and deliver business skill training for the operators, fishers and the co-operatives.
- Develop and deliver a workplace trainer course to develop local capacity in order to have good teachers or trainers to show and explain the proper way to learn the skills needed through training.

Increasing Youth Participation

Recommendation

Promote career opportunities for youth in the industry and the related areas to rejuvenate the industry.

Strategies

- Encourage youth to take classes in the sciences – biology.
- Arrange to have practicing commercial fishers (male and female) speak at career days.
- Promote career opportunities outside of direct fishing, such as Department of Fisheries and Oceans, processing/inspection occupations, bookkeeping, accounting and truck driving.
- Train and employ skilled fishers, to be teachers/mentors and use them to deliver training within their home communities or regions of the province.

- Adapt the Fresh Water Fish Marketing Corporation's Youth program to be able to deliver it in different areas of Saskatchewan to train youth.
- Utilize the younger fishers already working in the industry to attract other youth into the industry.
- Provide these young fishers with the skills and tools to do this recruitment, then use them as mentors and role models to keep the youth in the industry:
 - Training and development;
 - Promotional material, get them into schools across the north;
 - Career planning.
- Promote the co-operative principles to create effective and efficient co-operatives, who in turn can focus on developing the talents of the youth and offer employment opportunities.

Industry Image

Recommendation

The Steering Committee will work with its partners to create a positive image of the industry in order to sustain itself and to renew it with more youth entering the workforce.

Strategies

- Promote and speak about the positive things that are happening in the fishing industry in northern Saskatchewan to develop ways of getting the message out by undertaking things like:
 - Doing promos on Mississippi Broadcasting Corporation in the native languages of the north (Cree, Dene and English);
 - Interview people to get their comments on what's happening in the industry;
 - News articles in northern and Aboriginal newspapers;
 - Word of mouth is the most important method to get the message out;
 - Use the Band schools and non-Band schools to promote the industry; and
 - Inform the general public in the north through such organizations and individuals as schools, Department officials, the Elders, Senators, Band Chiefs and Councils.

Improved Communications

Recommendation

There is a need by the Steering Committee to improve communications by using the Sector Partnership to approach and address the issues found in this study.

Strategies

- Develop strategies to "work together";
- Work with agencies and organizations such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management (SERM), Saskatchewan Northern Affairs (SNA), Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to examine career opportunities for employment in other related occupations in the industry;
- Explore the co-op training model as a way to approach training;

- Share the results of the study with the representative stakeholder organizations and agencies.

Economic Viability of the Industry

Recommendation

The Steering Committee along with the industry need to work together to exchange ideas and implement ways for increasing revenue potential. The focus should be on those areas, such as quality and quantity as this is where they have control. This will require working with FFMC, training providers and government to implement those initiatives that will lead to increasing potential earning power of those working in the industry.

Strategies

- There are certain areas the fishers and co-operatives through the following activities can increase their revenues and thus the economic viability of the industry:
 - Upgrading the skill levels of the people in the industry;
 - Learning new technologies;
 - Youth coming into the industry with a good set of employment and essential skills;
 - Providing a good quality product that's ready for processing;
 - Work with FFMC to study the feasibility of establishing processing capabilities in the province which will increase revenue and value-added products that could go directly to market or on to FFMC in Winnipeg; this will create a need for further training in such areas as:
 - Feasibility studies;
 - Business planning and financing;
 - Technical skill development in processing;
 - Knowledge of processing;
 - Marketing and sales opportunities.
 - Develop the necessary training options that will be required for the processing plant operations.

Resource Management

Recommendation

The Steering Committee along with the SCFCFL work together with organizations like SNA, SERM, DFO and FFMC to assist the industry to be managers of their own resource.

Strategies

- Use the expertise available to:
 - Protect fish habitat;
 - Work together with a common purpose;
 - Learn roles and use the expertise of the organizations;
 - Educate and inform the governments and the public on what's happening in and on the lakes fished;
 - Share information to make it better over for everyone;

- Recognize the knowledge of the people in the industry, because they have a wealth of knowledge and experience;
- Train the public and the community leaders;
- Work to make the change for the better over the long term in order to sustain and expand the industry.

Next Steps

Over the coming months the Steering Committee in co-operation with key stakeholders will call an meeting to discuss the next steps required to implement the recommendations and organize to undertake the following:

- Develop an effective northern/southern user-friendly communication strategy to ensure the distribution of the study and the results are effectively communicated to all the relevant stakeholders.
- Arrange meetings with the education and training providers to prioritize and implement the relevant training needed for all facets of the industry.
- Explore avenues for potential funding and accessing available resources of and through the partners for on-going sustainability of the Sector Partnership.
- Undertake a review of the existing Steering Committee structure and membership to determine whether additional members are needed and who they may be.
- Prioritize the recommendations and strategies.
- Examine the various programs which are available for employers and the sector that will aid the hiring of new employees and prepare them to make the transition into the commercial fishing industry.