



THE FRESHWATER FISH MARKETING CORPORATION ENGAGEMENT 2017

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (Freshwater) is responsible for collecting, processing and marketing freshwater fish for approximately 1,700 fishers. In late 2017, the province of [Manitoba will withdraw from Freshwater](#), leaving the Northwest Territories (NWT) as the sole remaining jurisdiction.

This change will have implications on fishers who rely on the services offered by Freshwater to support their inland fishery – in some cases the fishery is the sole economic opportunity in the community. The departure of Manitoba has put Freshwater at a critical juncture. The corporation will need to evolve to ensure it can continue to support the fishery and livelihoods of fishers, especially those living in northern and remote communities.

To this end, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) undertook an initiative to engage with fishers, community members, First Nations and Métis stakeholders to better understand the challenges faced by fishers; the importance of the freshwater fishery; and the services offered by Freshwater that are most helpful and valued by fishers. The engagement took place online and in-person between July 17, 2017 and September 29, 2017. Feedback gathered as part of this initiative will prove beneficial as Freshwater looks to adapt to this new reality.

Fishers rely on Freshwater services to support their livelihoods. As such, some expressed concern about a future without Freshwater and would like to see the role of the corporation continue as it evolves to a more sustainable business model. Fishers spoke of the unique challenges facing the industry in their communities including unsustainable freight costs, distant processing capabilities, inadequate subsidies and difficulties in attracting and retaining younger workers.

There was substantial discussion among fishers over the payout they receive from Freshwater. Fishers claim the price they receive for their fish has remained stagnant and has not kept pace with rising costs and inflationary pressures. For some, this is a reason to look forward to an open market system where they may be able to acquire a higher price for their catch. For others, however, this would seem to point to the need for improved marketing and sales efforts on the part of Freshwater.

Fishers voiced their concerns about the current governance structure at Freshwater and the need for fishers to have a seat at the table. Some also called for increased transparency and a more “bottom up” approach to decision making; a move that fishers indicate would allow Freshwater to better represent their interests.

There were calls for an expansion of Freshwater service offerings, including the provision of benefits such as medical and pension benefits. Some view this as a way to entice younger fishers to the industry and enhance economic benefits to their communities. Fishers, particularly in northern and remote areas, would like to see Freshwater and the government invest in their community’s fishing infrastructure to maximize the economic benefit of the fishery.

Generally, perspectives and opinions were not regionally polarizing. However, Manitoba fishers, particularly those in northern and remote communities, did express the need for additional support to help them successfully participate in an open market. Many of these communities are apprehensive about their ability to attract private sector buyers and remain worried about the effects of an open market on their communities and livelihoods. However, some fishers in southern Manitoba who can more easily bring their catch to market are supportive of an open market and the potential to earn more for their fish.

There was little support for the dissolution or privatization of Freshwater. Fishers who participated in the engagement support the continuation of Freshwater in some capacity after the withdrawal of Manitoba. Fishers hopeful about the prospects of an open market feel that competition would be “good” for Freshwater, while some fishers, especially those from remote communities value the single desk marketing role that Freshwater currently plays.

Some fishers acknowledged that privatization wouldn’t necessarily yield better prices for fishers as private entities are more interested in their bottom line than providing fishers with a larger share of profits. They were more



supportive of an alternative business model that could address many of their primary concerns such as profit sharing, ownership over company assets, and greater control over strategic direction and governance.

Many of the concerns fishers have with governance of Freshwater could be partially alleviated with the establishment of a new business model that puts them at the helm and provides greater control over the fishery. It is believed that devolution of decision making responsibilities would allow fishers the ability to better negotiate pricing for themselves and may result in wider margins for fishers. With greater control, fishers could also provide benefits, such as a pension fund or training programs for community members.

An alternative model may also help alleviate some of the mistrust that fishers currently feel towards Freshwater. Nonetheless, many northern and remote communities still rely on investments from Freshwater or other levels of government, including the improvement of fishing infrastructure or transportation subsidies. Fishers feel these services are important to the sustainability and competitiveness of these communities.



2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The in-person engagement sessions were attended by more than 300 fishers and stakeholders. Concerns from across northern, remote and Indigenous communities were markedly consistent, particularly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Participants from the sessions in the Northwest Territories diverged in their views on marketing and the future of Freshwater. Another contrast in findings was evident when examining the results from northern and southern communities; those in northern communities were generally more supportive of Freshwater, while those in southern communities were more receptive to the prospects of an open market model.

- + Freshwater is recognized as producing high quality products and fishers are reluctant to see the disappearance of the organization;
- + The current pricing structure causes issues for fishers who believe the price they receive for their fish has not kept pace with rising costs and inflationary pressures;
- + Fishers are concerned that the current governance structure of Freshwater does not prioritize their needs and would like to see increased fisher representation;
- + NWT fishers are aware of and benefit from the services offered by Freshwater. They are working with their territorial government to create their own marketing brand and strategy;
- + Many fishers would like Freshwater to offer pension, health and other benefits. This is perceived to be an effective way of attracting younger entrants into the fishery;
- + Indigenous fishers from northern and remote communities fear they may be disproportionately affected by an open market system due to a lack of buyers or infrastructure and freight costs;
- + Indigenous and northern communities are apprehensive about the adverse economic consequences that an open market may have on their communities and way of life; and
- + Fishers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have concerns about environmental degradation and its effect on their fishing grounds.



3. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (Freshwater) was established under the [Freshwater Fish Marketing Act](#) in 1969. Freshwater is a Crown corporation mandated with the collection, processing and marketing of all freshwater fish in provinces and territories under its purview.

Originally, participating jurisdictions were Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (NWT). However, Ontario and Saskatchewan have since withdrawn from Freshwater, leaving Manitoba and the NWT as its sole active members while Alberta has closed its commercial fishery. That said, in 2016, the [Government of Manitoba announced their intention](#) to withdraw from Freshwater in 2017, leaving the NWT as the sole jurisdiction.

The impending withdrawal of Manitoba from Freshwater has created a sense of uncertainty. As such, Freshwater is at a critical juncture, both in terms of transforming its role as a single desk marketing organization and evolving its operating model to reflect its new environment. To better understand these issues and the need for Freshwater to adapt to better meet the needs of fishers, DFO undertook an initiative to engage with stakeholders both online and in-person regarding the future of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

DFO met with fishers, community members, First Nations, and Métis stakeholders in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. Invitations to participate were distributed to local fishing co-ops, as well as fishers and community stakeholders, and more than 300 fishers took part in the engagement across 19 communities (please see Appendix A for further details). Input from the facilitated discussion was captured by a note-taker, while additional feedback was also collected through evaluation sheets provided to participants at the in-person sessions.

DFO also gathered feedback through other channels, including a deliberative online survey and a question and answer forum. The online survey was designed to share information while also seeking input from participants. This approach allowed participants to gain a better understanding of the situation and expose them to diverse perspectives on the issue. Additional input was collected through electronic and mail submissions.



4. REGIONS AT A GLANCE

In order to help strengthen the inland fishery and ensure the Freshwater model can evolve in a way that is beneficial to fishers and Canadians, the Government of Canada developed priorities to guide this engagement initiative. These include: strengthening economic activity in Canada's northern and remote communities; considering Indigenous needs and priorities as related to reconciliation objectives; and enabling the continuation of services provided by Freshwater, especially in northern and Indigenous communities. In light of this, the engagement helped shed new light on fisher priorities and how issues may be more important in some regions over others. Even though issues were not drastically polarizing, regional distinctions did emerge among participants and result largely from the diverse geography and composition of fishing communities.

While many northern, remote and Indigenous communities are concerned about the sustainability of their industry in the face of an open market, fishers from southern communities are more receptive to an open market and are primarily preoccupied with the price they receive for their fish. In the Northwest Territories, fishers are working with their government on the implementation of the Great Slave Lake Revitalization Strategy and, as such, do not share many of the same concerns as Manitoba or Saskatchewan fishers.

Feedback has been clustered in the following way: northern Manitoba; southern Manitoba; Saskatchewan; and the Northwest Territories. A summary of highlights from each region is outlined below and is summarized in Table 1.

1. Northern Manitoba

Northern Manitoba includes many Indigenous and remote communities that rely on the services delivered by Freshwater to support their fishery. As such, they presented more apprehension regarding the impending withdrawal of Manitoba from Freshwater. However, many of the points raised do align with Government of Canada priorities. The fishery in these areas is often one of the primary economic activities in these communities and is viewed as an essential part of the economic and social fabric. This is compounded by the fact that many northern and remote communities rely on transportation subsidies. Northern and remote fishers – more than any other group – feel that Freshwater plays an essential role in the economic sustainability of fishing activities. They are concerned about the lack of large buyers for the local fish and feel the fishery forms an integral part of the economic and cultural livelihood of their communities. Nonetheless, fishers feel that Freshwater could better regain the trust of fishers by improving governance practices such as being more open and transparent with fishers and incorporating local knowledge practices into decision making. Many also believe the price they receive from Freshwater for their fish has remained stagnant over the years. Fishers feel Freshwater could deliver better prices to fishers through renewed marketing efforts and a leaner management structure.

2. Southern Manitoba

Fishers from southern Manitoba, largely supportive of the withdrawal of Manitoba from Freshwater, still believe that Freshwater has a role to play in supporting the fishery. These communities are predominantly situated at the southern end of Lake Winnipeg. Many southern fishers feel that they should not be mandated to sell to Freshwater exclusively and are supportive of an open market.

Fishers from southern Manitoba held diverse views about the future of Freshwater and the fishery in their communities. While many benefit from the services provided by Freshwater and do not wish to see the demise of the organization even in the face of an open market, they feel strongly that Freshwater contracts should be more flexible, to allow them to negotiate better terms. Fishers from southern Manitoba shared concerns with other fishers about the governance of Freshwater, including the need to improve financial oversight and need for more fisher representation on the Board of Directors.

3. Saskatchewan

In-person engagement sessions were held in two Saskatchewan communities: Pelican Narrows and Ile-a-la-Crosse. While Saskatchewan withdrew from the *Freshwater Fish Marketing Act* in 2012, many fishers and



cooperatives in rural Saskatchewan communities continue to rely on Freshwater services to process and market their fish. Many of the concerns and opinions of Saskatchewan fishers mirror those of northern Manitoba fishers, including the importance that fishers place on Freshwater’s role to sustain the fishery and deal with rising costs of freight and storage. Many fishers in Saskatchewan also raised concerns about provincial fisheries management, including competition with anglers for quotas and foreign investment.

4. Northwest Territories

The Government of the Northwest Territories recently released a [strategy for revitalizing the Great Slave Lake commercial fishery](#). The strategy calls for increased production, renewed processing capabilities and the development of new markets for Great Slave Lake fish, both internal and external to the Northwest Territories. Fishers from Hay River and Yellowknife spoke of the vast logistical challenges facing harvesters in their areas. Northwest Territories fishers also highlighted the perceived lack of investment and infrastructure in their area which they identify to be a major barrier to processing and market access.

Table 1: Summary of regional concerns and issues

Topics	Northern Manitoba	Southern Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Northwest Territories
Pricing of fish	High	High	High	High
Logistical and transportation issues	High	Low	Medium	High
Changes to Freshwater governance (i.e., increased fisher representation, more oversight)	High	High	High	Medium
Concerns over withdrawal of Manitoba from Freshwater	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Fisheries management	Medium	Medium	High	Medium

5. Common Areas of Interest

The pricing of fish is important for fishers as the commercial fishery is often their only source of income and a vital contributor to the local economy. The more fishers are able to get for their fish, the more communities will benefit from a strengthened local economy.

Changes to Freshwater’s governance was at the top of many fishers’ minds as they discussed the future of the corporation. Overall, fishers feel that there needs to be increased transparency from senior officials and more fisher representation on the Board of Directors. Changes to governance discussed by northern and Indigenous fishers also include the incorporation of traditional knowledge into decision making, aligning with the priority of considering Indigenous needs and priorities as related to reconciliation objectives.

Many of the concerns expressed over the withdrawal of Manitoba from Freshwater emerged as fishers feel they are unprepared to compete in an open market and are doubtful about finding buyers. The services offered by Freshwater are particularly important in northern and remote communities and many fishers are fearful about the future of their industry once they transition to an open market. Fishers want to see a continuation of the services offered by Freshwater in order to support their industry.

While not under the purview of Freshwater or the Government of Canada, fisheries management was an important topic for fishers from many areas. Indigenous fishers in particular would like an enhanced role in protecting fishery habitat and distributing quotas.



5. DETAILED FINDINGS

Findings from the in-person and online engagements are summarized into themes below. Each theme includes input received across all engagement methods and tools. Themes are sorted into eight distinct topics: strengths of the current Freshwater model; areas of improvement for the current Freshwater model; expansion of Freshwater services; remote- and northern-specific issues; Freshwater contracts; transitioning to an open market; alternative business models; and issues outside Freshwater's jurisdiction.

5.1. ENGAGEMENT THEME 1: PERCEIVED STRENGTHS OF FRESHWATER

- + Freshwater has a solid reputation as a processor and wholesaler for producing quality fish products and providing them to markets worldwide;
- + Freshwater offers a level of security to fishers who rely on the fishery to provide economic benefits for their community;
- + For Indigenous fishers, Freshwater helps them sustain a way of life that has existed for generations; and
- + Freshwater provides a reliable source of income that helps fishers secure loans or Employment Insurance (EI).

Participants of the in-person engagement sessions had a lot to say about the strengths of the current Freshwater operating model.

Overall, fishers feel that Freshwater “has a good reputation for quality fish products” and provides a level of security for their industry and communities. Security offered by the corporation includes a guaranteed price for fishers' catch, ability to purchase several species of fish and ability to buy fish in large amounts. For some communities, the level of trust and familiarity with Freshwater means they feel comfortable working out their differences. Fishers believe that if Freshwater continues to build on their existing relationship with fishers, they should have no problem maintaining a market share in an open market environment.

The level of reliability and economic security afforded by Freshwater resonates especially among fishers from northern, remote and Indigenous communities. Fishers from these communities feel that Freshwater's services, including collection, processing, and marketing, play an essential role in the viability of their industry and communities. These value-added services offered by Freshwater are thought to “offer stability to fishers who only want to fish.” Fishers and stakeholders also expressed their confidence in Freshwater to deliver these value-added services while being less inclined to build the capacity to complete the services themselves. This sentiment stems from the desire of fishers to focus exclusively on fishing and rely on Freshwater to deliver the value-added services needed to bring their fish to market.

It is a common sentiment among northern and Indigenous fishers that Freshwater is essential to their fisheries. Meeting participants from several First Nations and Métis communities in northern Manitoba emphasized that fishing is often the only industry, or the most important, in their communities and provides employment and economic benefits. Because of this mandate, some feel that Freshwater plays an integral role in protecting their communities' cultural history and way of life. Several First Nations and Métis communities also highlighted that Freshwater facilitates the fishery and redistributes its benefits to community members across geographic regions.

“ Support of Freshwater is one way that the Federal government can meet responsibilities for Indigenous peoples by creating economic opportunities and supporting their community and traditional way of life. ”

Other fishers discussed the importance of Freshwater in providing a stable source of income. Without Freshwater, “it would be difficult to get loans” because of the lack of guaranteed income for many fishers. The latter rely on the



Community Economic Development Fund (CEDF) and Freshwater loans to acquire equipment and expand their trade.

Employment Insurance (EI) is an important issue for every fisher given the seasonal nature of their industry and their dependence on the federal program to supplement their incomes after fishing season closes. Freshwater facilitates fishers' access to EI benefits through administrative services. Fishers consider this an essential service. While it was discussed that the corporation helps fishers access EI benefits, there is uncertainty among fishers about whether they will be able to access EI benefits in the future and how they would do so if they are working with private buyers in an open market.

5.2. ENGAGEMENT THEME 2: PERCEIVED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR FRESHWATER

- + Fishers feel they should receive a higher price for their fish;
- + Many fishers believe that improved marketing efforts from Freshwater could open new markets and create better value for their fish;
- + Fishers want to see changes made to the governance structure at Freshwater, particularly in regard to fisher representation on the Board of Directors and/or senior management; and
- + The lack of processing capabilities of northern and remote communities was identified as an area that could be improved to maximize local economic benefits and deliver a quality product by processing fish as soon as they are caught.

Fishers and stakeholders had much to say when discussing areas of improvement for current Freshwater services. For many, the most notable improvement centered on price. Most comments included the need for Freshwater to improve the final payment it provides fishers at the end of the season to better reflect the price fishers feel they should be receiving for their fish.

There is widespread frustration among fishers that, while costs have increased over time, the price for fish has not kept pace, especially for many northern and remote fishers: "the price of the fish doesn't allow for a good living in isolated communities where everything is expensive." This is a common sentiment among fishers who believe the price of fish has remained stagnant and is not consistent with the current "price of operating" a fishing operation.

The low margins fishers receive on their catch leads to a strain on their cash flow which fishers feel impacts them the most. Moreover, fishers believe the low price they receive doesn't accurately reflect their performance. There is also a perception that Freshwater looks after the wellbeing of their staff before fishers: "We feel corporation staff shouldn't be making a better quality of life than fishermen."

Changing the pay structure for fishers was also discussed in several sessions. Some fishers want to change the pay structure to a bi-weekly format like that of Freshwater employees. Others expressed the desire for adding a second payment earlier in the year, instead of the current model of one final payment. It was also suggested that Freshwater could structure itself to enable Status Indian fishers who deliver fish on reserve to benefit from tax exemptions.

When discussing improvements to the existing Freshwater model, the conversation also included governance-related issues and the influence that fishers exert over decision-making at Freshwater.

Many fishers feel disconnected from senior Freshwater staff and management and that "decisions are not communicated by the upper management." Fishers hoped for increased transparency as the perceived lack of communication has fueled a sense of distrust among fishers.

“ Freshwater needs to be proactive in opening new markets. ”



Fishers also expressed concern over the appointment process used for Freshwater management and Board of Directors, characterizing it as overly “political.” They feel it should incorporate “better oversight that could include fishers.” While many fishers enjoy a strong relationship with their local Freshwater representatives, there is a broader feeling of distrust towards management.

Processing of fish and marketing capabilities of Freshwater were another area of improvement identified by fishers. It is thought that Freshwater could be more active in pursuing other markets and opportunities for their catch, including whitefish and other underutilized species.

Other fishers feel Freshwater could be more effective in processing and transporting fish. The need for local, community-based processing capacity, particularly for northern and remote communities, was a common theme during in-person sessions. In several communities, it was mentioned that a cooperative model could serve as a means of helping northern and remote communities with marketing and selling their fish.

5.3. ENGAGEMENT THEME 3: INTEREST TO EXPAND FRESHWATER’S SERVICES

- + Many fishers feel that providing pension and medical benefits would help attract younger fishers to the industry and make it more equitable, especially as it relates to Freshwater employees;
- + Training and providing start-up funding was also suggested as a way of enticing young people to enter the industry and participate as helpers in the fishery; and
- + Investment in fishing infrastructure, such as storage or processing capabilities, could benefit inland fishers, create economic spinoffs and help level the playing field with coastal fishers.

Fishers often discussed services they would like to see offered by Freshwater. These services are seen by fishers as a way of making their industry more sustainable. Services most often mentioned include those that could help during retirement and facilitate the provision of insurance or training. In particular, fishers discussed how health and pension benefits could make the industry more equitable. Other services include the facilitation of insurance coverage or a relief fund, such as coverage in case of a disaster, or for fishing equipment.

The provision of benefits and expansion of Freshwater services was also seen as a way of attracting a new generation to the fishing industry. This would help Indigenous communities and cultures sustain a way of life that has been in place in their communities for generations, a particularly important point for Indigenous fishers.

Other services to facilitate the entrance of younger people in the fishery discussed by fishers include help with start-up costs and training programs. Start-up costs represent a major barrier to new entrants in the industry and are also a barrier for established fishers who face yearly start-up costs. Training in “business and financial planning” is seen to be a possible incentive for younger fishers and workers to participate in the industry. Fishers also expressed concern about the sustainability of their industry and its effect on the community. Young people were discussed as being essential to the future of the industry, particularly in northern and remote communities.

Employing more community members in the industry is also imperative to the sustainability of the industry. Fishers described how it is difficult to find and retain workers, who are essential to their operation. Fishers feel training for young people would support the recruitment process. Local workers from the community would help ensure communities receive economic benefits from the fishery and ensure a sustainable industry.

Supporting and expanding investment is important for many inland fishers who feel that they have less access to funding programs compared to coastal fishers. It is felt that federal support could improve the marketing ability of Freshwater and “would really help” inland fishers and level the playing field.



5.4. ENGAGEMENT THEME 4: REMOTE AND NORTHERN ISSUES

- + Transportation and freight costs are a major obstacle for many northern and remote fishers;
- + Current subsidies are inadequate to help with the costs;
- + Northern and remote fishers are worried about a perceived lack of buyers for their fish in the open market; and
- + Fishers in the NWT are implementing their own strategy to sell their fish locally and market it as a high-quality product considering their remote location.

Fishers from northern and remote communities bring a unique perspective to the engagement. Their concerns are unique and central to the mandate of Freshwater. Sessions in remote communities such as Poplar River (MB), The Pas (MB), Brochet (MB), Hay River (NWT), Wabowden (MB) and Leaf Rapids (MB) yielded several issues specific to remote and northern fisheries.

Issues unique to these areas include the disproportionate amount of freight costs that northern and remote fishers incur when transporting their fish to a Freshwater pick-up point. This is a challenge felt by fishers around Lake Winnipeg (MB) who rely on OmniTrax rail service to deliver their fish to a pick-up location: “Fishers depend on the train operated by OmniTrax as there is no road infrastructure. Train service is unreliable.” These costs are compounded for fishers who require multimodal transportation, boat, train and truck, to transport their catch for pick-up or processing.

Fishers who reside in communities that rely on air cargo, such as Poplar River, report similar issues: “Transportation is a challenge when the airstrip allows planes with a maximum of 9 passengers. Freight is a challenge.” Air freight can pose logistical and financial difficulties for many fishers who rely on getting their catch transported in a reasonable timeframe and delays may result in a lower quality fish.

Fishers from communities that incur significant transportation costs, such as Norway House, feel they should benefit from northern transportation subsidies. Those who do qualify for the provincial subsidy fear that it may be discontinued.

A significant challenge for northern and remote communities as they prepare for an open market is the perceived lack of buyers: “buyers are not coming to my community.” Fishers from northern and remote communities expressed concern about open market buyers purchasing their catch for a fair price. Fishers who have had recent contact with buyers are worried about the ability or willingness of private buyers to purchase large amounts of fish: “One buyer only wanted to buy one container of fish.” This contrasts with fishers from southern communities along Lake Winnipeg (MB) who feel they could benefit from an open market and buyer competition. Fishers who had experience with the open market model prior to Freshwater’s creation held similar views about the difficulties of finding and attracting buyers.

Fishers in northern and remote communities also feel their communities are disadvantaged in their capacity to participate in the fishery. Fishers outline what they perceive to be inequitable investment concentrated mostly in larger centers and that their communities were being left behind: “Nothing is being spent in Berens River.” Fishers thought Freshwater could invest more in northern and remote infrastructure to improve fisher sheds, increase the capacity for winter fisheries, upgrade processing and storage capabilities. Fishers in northern and remote communities spoke of the unique challenges facing their fisheries and infrastructure, including a lack of electricity to produce ice or lake ice conditions that can persist well into the spring.

In the NWT, fishers had a different approach to their northern and remote location. Fishers in the NWT are looking to develop their own branding to promote fish from Great Slave Lake. In Yellowknife, fishers sell their product locally to avoid transporting to Winnipeg for processing. They are also looking to develop local infrastructure to expand this practice and better meet market demand.



5.5. ENGAGEMENT THEME 5: FRESHWATER CONTRACTS

- + Some fishers would prefer to have 1-year contracts over the multi-year contract that is currently offered by Freshwater; and
- + Fishers don't understand why Freshwater assigns a 25% reduction in the price if they don't sign a contract.

Contracts were a contentious topic, perhaps because many fishers were in the process of negotiating or signing new contracts during the engagement period. Currently, fishers in Manitoba are being offered 3 or 5 year contracts with Freshwater. Multiyear contracts provide Freshwater with a reliable source of fish for processing and marketing activities. Fishers who do not sign a contract and later choose to sell to Freshwater, would do so at a non-preferred price (25% less than contracted fishers). Fishers expressed the need for more clarity around existing contracts and why multi-year agreements are required. They don't understand the contract renewal process or the preferred pricing for contracts.

Those who have entered into a contract with Freshwater through a community-based fishers cooperative, are not supportive of an open market system and are more likely to support the current Freshwater contracting process. These fishers prefer the stability of the Freshwater model to process and market their fish and don't understand why they can't have both: "They wanted security. That's why they signed." Fishers supportive of the open market still want the ability to sell their fish to Freshwater, despite the requirement for a contract.

5.6. ENGAGEMENT THEME 6: TRANSITIONING TO OPEN MARKET

- + Southern fishers expressed the least resistance or concern about the transition to an open market;
- + Northern, Indigenous and fishers living in remote communities are the most apprehensive about the ability to operate in an open market;
- + Despite their different perspectives regarding the value of Freshwater, fishers overall want Freshwater to continue operating in some capacity; and
- + Many fishers in Manitoba discussed the potential benefits and pitfalls resulting from an open market.

For some fishers, this transition is a welcomed change. They feel the current model is more like "you're the owner of a company, but have no say" in how it's run. For many fishers, particularly in southern communities, it is thought that the transition to an open market may provide fishers a better price for their fish than what is currently provided by Freshwater. However, other fishers, particularly in northern and remote communities, are less enthusiastic about the transition.

Fishers hope that Freshwater remains operating in some capacity. For some, the shakeup of the fishery in Manitoba and transition to an open market may "just be what [Freshwater] needs." Nonetheless, the security and ability to fall back on Freshwater is important for many fishers, particularly in Indigenous and northern communities.

Many fishers and stakeholders discussed their fears about how privatization of Freshwater might impact their communities. Fishers from northern and remote communities particularly outlined how they would be disproportionately affected by such a move: "I'm very concerned for our community. Who's going to buy our fish?" Many communities benefit from the stability and services offered by Freshwater. Indigenous communities feel they would be especially impacted, since the services provided are imperative to the viability of their fishery and the continuation of a way of life that has existed for generations.

Even for fishers from southern communities, there was no consensus to dismantle or privatize the structure of Freshwater in the face of an open market system in Manitoba. Some fishers believe that the open market would



only help to improve the current form of Freshwater: “I don’t think anyone here wants to see the demise of Freshwater. I believe a bit of competition would improve it.”

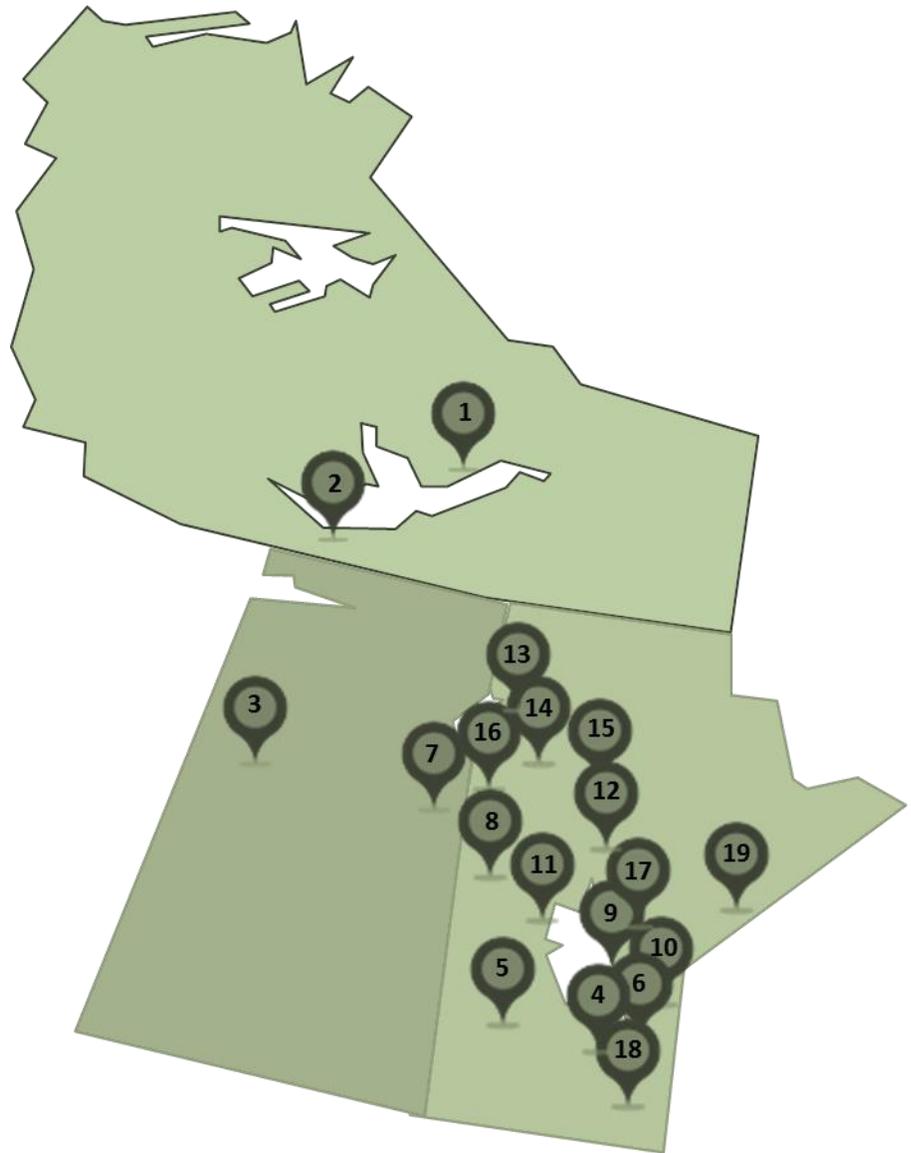
Whatever the new structure has in store, fishers feel a sense of ownership over Freshwater and there is a perception that its assets “are owned by the fishermen.” This sense of ownership presided over fishers’ comments whenever they discussed the possibility of changing the structure of Freshwater. As such, it is thought that if Freshwater were to close, its “assets should go to the fishermen.” This is a recurring theme among fishers, who feel a sense of safety in knowing that Freshwater, and its assets, are always available to them.



Appendix A: communities at a glance

MAP OF COMMUNITIES

#	Community
1	Yellowknife, NT
2	Hay River, NT
3	Île à la Crosse, SK
4	Fisher Richer, MB
5	Winnipegosis, MB
6	Matheson Island, MB
7	Pelican Narrows, SK
8	The Pas, MB
9	Poplar River, MB
10	Berens River, MB
11	Grand Rapids, MB
12	Wabowden, MB
13	Brochet, MB
14	Leaf Rapids, MB
15	Nelson House, MB
16	Pukatawagan, MB
17	Norway House, MB
18	Winnipeg, MB
19	Garden Hill, MB





ENGAGEMENT EVENTS: DATES AND LOCATIONS

Location	Date
Yellowknife, NT	July 20, 2017
Hay River, NT	July 21, 2017
Îleà la Crosse, SK	July 24, 2017
Fisher River, MB	July 26, 2017
Winnipegosis, MB	July 27, 2017
Matheson Island, MB	July 31, 2017
Pelican Narrows, SK	August 1, 2017
The Pas, MB	August 2, 2017
Poplar River, MB	August 8, 2017
Berens River, MB	August 8, 2017
Grand Rapids, MB	August 9, 2017
Wabowden, MB	August 10, 2017
Brochet, MB	August 14, 2017
Leaf Rapids, MB	August 15, 2017
Nelson House, MB	August 16, 2017
Pukatawagan, MB	August 17, 2017
Norway House, MB	August 17, 2017
Winnipeg, MB	August 22, 2017
Garden Hill, MB	August 23, 2017