

NUU-CHAH-NULTH SEAFOOD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

CFE PROFILE

OVERVIEW

At one time every member of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations had some connection to fishing. Those days are gone, but they're coming back in a new form. The Nations are starting to restore that deep-rooted connection to fishing, and to its economic, social and cultural benefits, in a way that works in the modern world.

A leader in this restoration is the Nuu-chah-nulth Seafood Development Corporation (NSDC). It's a lean business with a broad mandate, and is leveraging a wide range of resources to develop fisheries-related jobs.

NSDC's diverse successes to date range from the grassroots to the dramatic - from "supporting fishermen and women" to buying a significant coastal cannery. The resources it draws on include expertise from its professional board, the experience of local people, financial backing from the Nuu-chah-nulth Economic Development Corporation (NEDC), partners in the industry, and funding and support from the Pacific Integrated Commercial Fishing Initiative (PICFI) program of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

PICFI SUPPORT

NSDC was first formed in 2003 with a mandate to develop shellfish aquaculture, but in its first years held no assets. Some shareholder nations had shellfish tenures, and some members had boats and licences. NSDC looked to grow from that base and widened its focus to all seafood. PICFI provided the first assets (licences and quota) and basic operating funding. NSDC had only one employee who worked out of her own home, so administrative costs were low. This meant that

funding could focus on training and setting up support structures for fishermen. It recently purchased office space in Port Alberni and now operate from there.

PICFI requires First Nations to engage in the program through a Commercial Fishing Enterprise (CFE). NSDC is that commercial entity for six of the fourteen Nuu-chah-nulth Nations. Each appoints a trustee to the NSDC board, which has a mission to "pursue economic success for shareholder nations while maintaining high values for people, culture and the marine environment."

"When PICFI came along, that's when we really took off," says NSDC administrator Kathy Happynook. "In 2008 we started working with our shareholders on setting a new direction, and in 2010 we submitted our business plan to PICFI. PICFI definitely helped launch us."

SUPPORTING CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

NSDC is restoring the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations' connection with fish and rebuilding a robust knowledge base by training members for fisheries jobs and grandfathering in experienced fishermen who may not have had the right certification. NSDC president Larry Johnson says, "Through developing a proven track record, we've now got trust from our shareholding Nations and have people really supporting the initiatives of the Nation's growing fishermen."

Combining traditional values of environmental stewardship with a professional board and economic focus, NSDC is helping its member Nations reconnect with their seafood resources. While the number of licences and quota from PICFI only supports a limited number of fishermen, NSDC is hopeful that PICFI will

continue to provide enough assets to meet the needs of its member Nations.

DEVELOPING ECONOMY, JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES

NSDC's most basic activity is to help develop new fishermen, with a focus on young members, and to help member fishermen make as good a living as possible. NSDC has provided access to marine safety training and since 2010 approximately 200 marine safety certificates have been issued in small vessel operations and safety. Some of its members have gone on to more advanced training.

NSDC takes an innovative approach to the use of its licences and related quota. Member fishermen are part of an incentive program that balances benefits to shareholding Nations with economic viability to the fishermen. Almost all of the licences and quota are used by Nuu-chah-nulth fishermen but if a licence is issued to a non-member, NSDC uses that person's experience to create mentoring positions for Nuu-chah-nulth members as deckhands.

Diversifying its portfolio as a means to create the most opportunity has always been NSDC's focus. At its conception, shareholders directed the board to retain all earnings for five years to grow the business. The first five-year period was nearing its end at a time when two new federal programs were coming online to further spark First Nation business success in sustainable seafood. One program was DFO's Business Development Source (BDS), to expand harvest-related activities. The other was under the Strategic Partnerships Initiative (SPI) from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to encourage diversification.

NSDC Board had spent the previous two years assessing business opportunities and drafting feasibility studies and business plans. In keeping with its focus on the

importance of diversification, NSDC purchased a prawn vessel with a shrimp licence with the help of BDS funding. The previous owner will stay with the boat for a transition period to train and mentor Nuu-chah-nulth crew.

The most ambitious NSDC project to date is the acquisition of St. Jean's Cannery & Smokehouse located in Nanaimo, the only cannery of any size remaining in BC. The company was bought with NSDC's retained earnings, NEDC funding, Pacific Commercial Fisheries Diversification Initiative funding and bank loans. The benefits of the cannery acquisition range from earning profits for reinvestment, to capacity building in every aspect of a processing business from forklift operation to management.

THE FUTURE

NSDC continues to grow its training programs' capacity and breadth. In 2016, it ran the 'Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program', which worked with educators to find ways to give training access to high school students that were interested in fisheries careers. "It needs to be a multi-faceted approach, and NSDC is trying to attract the educators and the students at a young age so they get transferable skills to be able to fit somewhere in our vertically integrated seafood company," says Johnson.

The NSDC mandate stays the same, and it will keep diversifying its' portfolio to give more members access to marine related jobs, and helping those already employed make the best possible living. It is looking to diversify into shellfish aquaculture in 2016. "We're all trying to build the economy", says Johnson, "and to build the west coast of Canada's pristine coastline to the benefit of all Canada. We feed people, that's what it's about."