



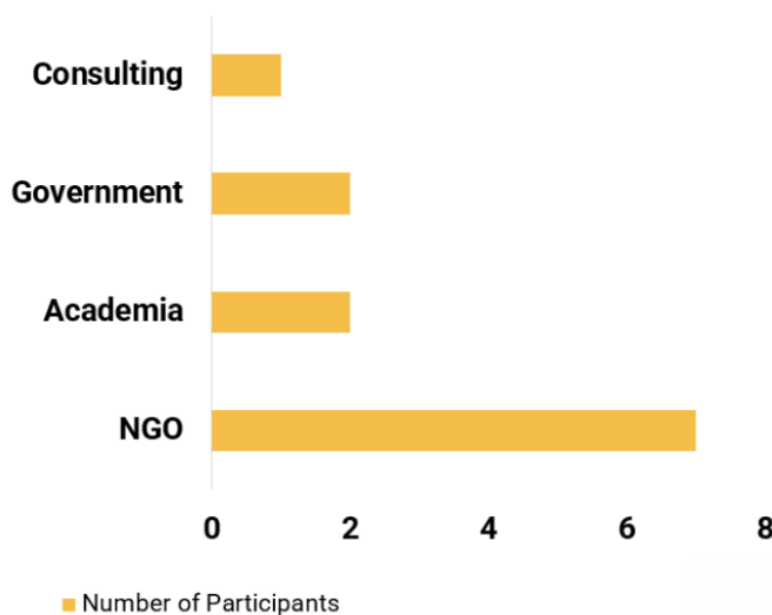
Improving Engagement and Accessibility in the Sustainable Seafood Space for Small-Scale Fisheries: Outcomes and Takeaways from Ocean Wise’s Small-scale fisheries Workshop at the Ocean Research in Canada Alliance (ORCA) Conference in St. John’s Newfoundland (June 2, 2023).

By Sam Renshaw & Scott McIlveen (Ocean Wise Fisheries & Seafood Initiative)
June 26, 2023

Purpose & Overview

Ocean Wise’s Fisheries and Seafood Initiative tackles the issue of overfishing by helping consumers and business partners make informed decisions about sustainable seafood choices. Acknowledging that there is a growing need to include small-scale fisheries (SSF) more closely in the sustainable seafood movement the purpose of this 90-minute workshop was to address the question “How might we improve engagement and accessibility in the sustainable seafood space for small-scale Canadian producers?”. By leveraging the power of the Ocean Research in Canada Alliance and focusing on three areas of the Ocean Decade: an accessible ocean, a productive ocean, and a healthy and resilient ocean, this workshop was designed to inform Ocean Wise’s direction in the SSF space moving forward. Topics covered included funding opportunities and support, Indigenous engagement, the sustainable seafood movement, resource management, supply chain issues, and data challenges.

Attendance & Demographics



The workshop was attended by a diverse group of participants representing various stakeholders in the sustainable seafood industry. The attendees included representatives from community organizations, government offices, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals with expertise in fisheries management and sustainability.

Figure 1. Workshop demographics.



Methods

During the session, participants were engaged in open discussion regarding what opportunities and barriers exist to increasing inclusivity and engagement of small-scale Canadian fisheries in the sustainable seafood movement. Participants were first asked to share examples of what is currently working well in the sustainable seafood space, then identify challenges and barriers, by writing their ideas onto sticky notes. Participants were able to provide as many answers as desired and additional thoughts from plenary discussion were captured by facilitators. Similar ideas were grouped together by the facilitators throughout the session. Once all ideas had been collected and organized, participants were asked to vote anonymously using dot stickers on which barriers should be prioritized throughout the rest of the session. Four barriers with the highest number of votes were then used to develop action-based questions posed by facilitators. Solutions to these barriers were ideated by participants through sticky notes or written down on chart paper by the facilitators. These solutions were then used to draw takeaways for the Ocean Wise team during continued work in the SSF space.



Sticky notes submitted by participants to identify successes and barriers in SSF sustainability engagement.

Results

Summary of Opportunities

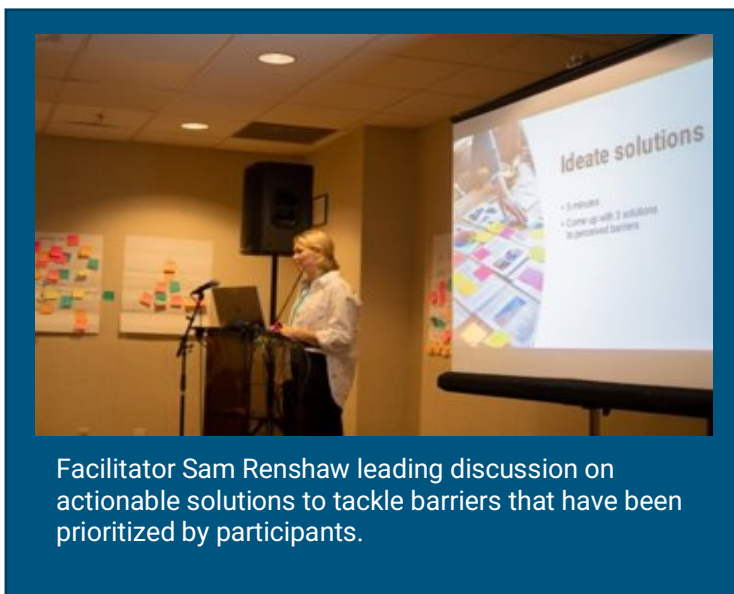
Participants acknowledged the increasing availability of funding and support from various institutions to aid small-scale fisheries in their transition towards sustainable practices. They emphasized the importance of engaging with SSF and Indigenous communities, valuing their knowledge and expertise to foster collaboration and promote sustainability. The participants also recognized the positive impact of the sustainable seafood movement, with growing consumer awareness and interest in sustainable options. They highlighted the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, such as the use of seafood logos like Ocean Wise's or the Marine Stewardship Council's, in influencing consumer choices. Canada's relatively healthy fish stocks and sound scientific approach to stock assessments were acknowledged, emphasizing the significance of effective resource management for sustainability. Finally, opportunities were identified to enhance the seafood supply chain, leveraging Canada's robust food safety requirements to improve quality and traceability of products.



Summary of Barriers

Participants prioritized the following themes as key barriers in the Canadian SSF space:

- 1) *Capacity at fishery/ENGO/Government Interface:* Overwhelmingly participants emphasized the need to address the capacity limitations at the interface of SSF, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs), and government bodies. This was both the most common suggestion from participants as well as the most highly prioritized for actionable solutions during the voting process (Figure 2). Equitable and accessible approaches to engagement were called for, with a focus on reaching remote communities and those with limited funding and capacity.
- 2) *Sustainable seafood landscape:* The complexity arising from numerous certification options and varying definitions of sustainability across different eco-labels was highlighted as a critical barrier in the sustainable seafood landscape. This was the second most common barrier and priority identified by participants (Figure 2). Clearer definitions and increased transparency in marine eco-labels were posed as crucial solutions to enable consumers to make informed choices about their seafood. In the realm of sustainable seafood, there exists an overwhelming array of certification options, which poses a challenge for the SSF sector. To remain competitive against larger industrial counterparts, SSF needs to establish their value and relevance. Also identified was a noticeable absence of eco-labels specifically tailored to Indigenous small-scale fisheries, raising questions about their interest in such certifications. It is crucial to prioritize and amplify the voices of SSF stakeholders to ensure their perspectives are considered.



- 3) *Supply chain challenges:* Participants identified supply chain barriers, including a lack of knowledge about the origin of purchased seafood and the absence of local fish markets as the key issue preventing connection between consumers and local SSF. While there were only two initial barriers proposed related to supply chain issues, when asked to prioritize issues, not knowing where their seafood was coming from was highly prioritized and followed similar discussion points as addressed within the sustainable seafood



landscape solutions (Figure 2). These challenges underscored the need for improved traceability and the establishment of local markets or processors to facilitate direct transactions between consumers and SSF.

- 4) *Data*: The existence of data barriers and incompatible knowledge systems pose challenges in fisheries management as outlined by participants. Not all necessary data is readily available, and when available, it may lack essential metadata required to ensure accuracy. Additionally, there is often a disconnect between Western scientific data collection methods and the understanding of these methods by fishers who rely on traditional knowledge systems. These factors contribute to the complexity of integrating diverse data sources and creating comprehensive fisheries data systems but was not the highest priority out of the other barriers identified as decided by participants (Figure 2).

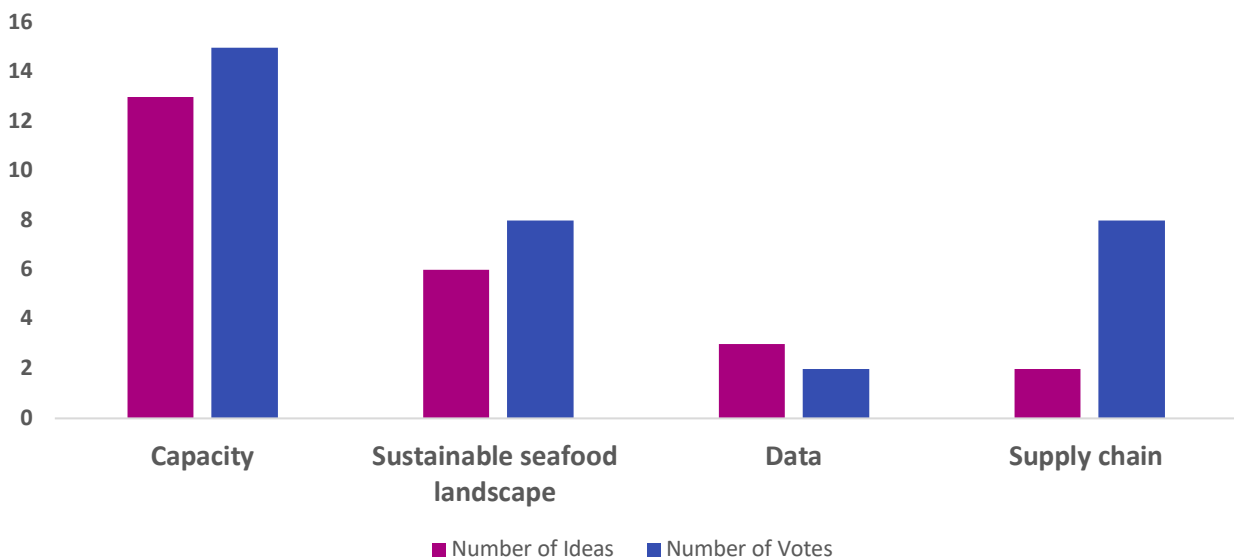


Figure 2. Participants identified barriers to engaging SSF in sustainable seafood programs which could be broadly categorized into the following categories. The number of ideas related to each theme is depicted in pink, as well as the number of votes each thematic area received for prioritization by participants.



Takeaways & Next Steps

Based on the discussions and outcomes of the session, collaborative relationships among SSF, Indigenous communities, government bodies, and environmental organizations are needed to strengthen the SSF sector and promote sustainability in Canadian fisheries. Equitable and meaningful engagement is paramount when seeking access to resources and support that will aid SSF in enhancing capacity and improving sustainable practices. Also heard was the need for investment in consumer education and awareness campaigns to further the sustainable seafood movement, highlighting the benefits of effective labeling systems. Efforts to enhance supply chain traceability and establish local markets facilitating direct transactions between consumers and SSF are necessary to increase product value and foster connections to local food production. The scientific approach to resource management, including stock assessments and regulations, should be maintained and improved to ensure the long-term sustainability of fisheries. Lastly, communication and collaboration between certification bodies, industry stakeholders, and consumer groups are essential to establish clear definitions and increased transparency in marine eco-labels, empowering consumers to make informed choices and supporting the growth of sustainable seafood markets.

One clear takeaway from this workshop is that many of these priority areas have already been identified and many capable individuals and organizations are working at tackling the issues therein. Capacity remains an issue whether due to financial or human capital. As a collective, we must work collaboratively to support each other and add capacity wherever possible. Ocean Wise is uniquely poised to bridge SSF and consumers moving forward, and we will do our best to do so equitably and responsibly. By focusing on these takeaways, the sustainable seafood industry can further enhance engagement, accessibility, and sustainability for SSF, contributing to the overall health and resilience of our oceans.



Acknowledgements

We want to thank our participants for sharing their thoughts and ideas! We hope to continue building relationships in the SSF space and encourage anyone that is interested in learning more or collaborating to please get in touch with the author(s) or email seafood@ocean.org.

