



The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq



# Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters Gathering



February 7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024

FINAL REPORT JUNE 2025

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UNIVERSITY

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## Acknowledgements

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We would also like to sincerely thank Andrea Bishop (Resolution Health Support Advisor) and Katelynn Luymes (Mental Wellness Case Manager) for offering mental health support during the workshop.

Photos by Alanna Syliboy



Social Sciences and Humanities  
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Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

## Introduction

The gathering of Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters during February 2024 brought together Mi'kmaw women from various communities in Nova Scotia to discuss their experiences, challenges, and aspirations within their fishing activities. This report summarizes the main points discussed during the gathering and provides recommendations to support Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters.

### **Background**

For thousands of years Mi'kmaw women have been engaging in the practice of *Netukulimk* for food and livelihoods, providing for their families and communities. More broadly, *Netukulimk* encompasses providing (food and livelihood) for your family and community without compromising the integrity of the ecosystems on which we depend. Harvesting fish remains a central food, livelihood, and cultural practice. There has been an increasing number of women participating in a broad range of fisheries from food, commercial to treaty fisheries. This resurgence of women's participation however has not been without challenges. For generations settler colonial patriarchy or male dominated systems have been imposed on our communities. Subsequently, Indigenous women are often excluded from participating in natural resource economic sectors or in related decision-making processes. And when they do, they face discrimination, workplace harassment and violence which has become a frequent occurrence (see MMIWG Final Inquiry Report 2019).

Although there are workplace policies and procedures that enforce respectful workplace behaviours at formal workplaces, fishing vessels and other water-based practices for food and livelihoods are generally outside of this purview resulting in limited redress processes for Mi'kmaw/Indigenous women to pursue when they experience discrimination and/or violence. This project aims to revitalize a matriarchal focused program that centers the voices and experiences of Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters to foster positive

engagement and learning from each other by enacting Mi'kmaw ancestral and cultural protocols for making respectful relations such as *Ankukamkewe* (making relations) and *Nikmatut* (family and community relationships).

## Objectives

1. To provide a safe, inclusive environment in which Mi'kmaw women fish harvesters can share their struggles and past experiences, and strategies for prevention as well as redress.
2. To provide traditional support systems to Mi'kmaw women fish harvesters who have experienced violence, abuse, and harassment while on the water and in training.
3. To develop resources to assist Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters in successfully navigating a male-dominated industry.
4. To proactively address the MMIWG Calls to Justice relating to governance and UNDRIP (also the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Act).



## Workshop Overview



On February 7, 8, and 9, 2024, the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq hosted a healing retreat for Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters at the Best Western Glengarry hotel in Truro, Nova Scotia.

The goal of the retreat was to encourage the revitalization of matriarchal focussed programs that center on the voices and experiences of Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters by engaging and learning from each other, in a good way, by enacting Mi'kmaw ancestral and cultural protocols (Ankukamkewe and Nikmatut) for making respectful relations.

The gathering was a great success with 39 women in attendance (Fisherwomen, Chiefs, CMM's Resolution Support Team, note takers, presenters, and facilitators), participating in a variety of Rematriation activities including painting, beading, quilling, and a pipe ceremony. The gathering also provided opportunity for women working in various fishing activities (food, ceremonial, treaty/commercial) to share lived experiences on the water and develop a support network with other women fishers. The event also provided opportunity for CMM, in partnership with Dalhousie, to compile information in hopes of developing an action plan as pertains to creating safer work environments.

The project received support and assistance from Dr./District Chief Sherry Pictou, Tier 2 Canada Research Chair, Indigenous Governance (Social Science Humanities Research Council) and the Ārramāt: Biodiversity Conservation and the Health and Well-being of Indigenous Peoples (New Frontiers Research Fund), and Dr. Pictou's research team, Dr. Polina Baum-Talmor, Ocean Nexus Nippon Foundation and Morgan Brimacombe, CRC Research Assistant Coordinator at Dalhousie University. Dr Pictou and Dr. Baum-Talmor followed up with extensive research interviews and are working with CMM (Alanna and Lisa) to facilitate more gatherings.

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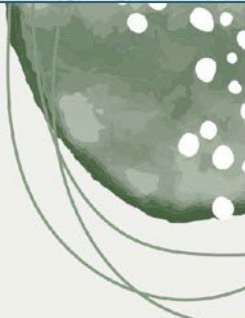
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# Workshop Schedule

## Fisher Women's Gathering

To help understand, support, and appreciate our Mi'kmaw Fisher Women.



<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Activities</b>
11:00am	<b>Registration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- light refreshments</li></ul>
12:00pm	<b>Opening Ceremonies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Welcome and prayer with District Chief Sherry</li><li>- Explanation of event and outcomes</li><li>- Introductions</li><li>- Resolution Support Team Introductions</li><li>- Water ceremony with Tonya Francis</li><li>- Smudging</li></ul>
1:00 – 2:00 pm	<b>Lunch</b>
2:00 – 5:00 pm	<b>Crafting and Conversations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Drum making with Andrea Kingham (2 groups of 20)</li><li>- Fisheries and you with Alanna Syliboy (2 groups of 20)</li></ul>
5:00 – 6:00pm	<b>Supper</b>
6:00 – 9:00pm	<b>Crafts and Conversations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Beading with Chief Andrea (2 groups of 20)</li><li>- Fisheries and you with Alanna Syliboy (2 groups of 20)</li><li>- Networking</li></ul>



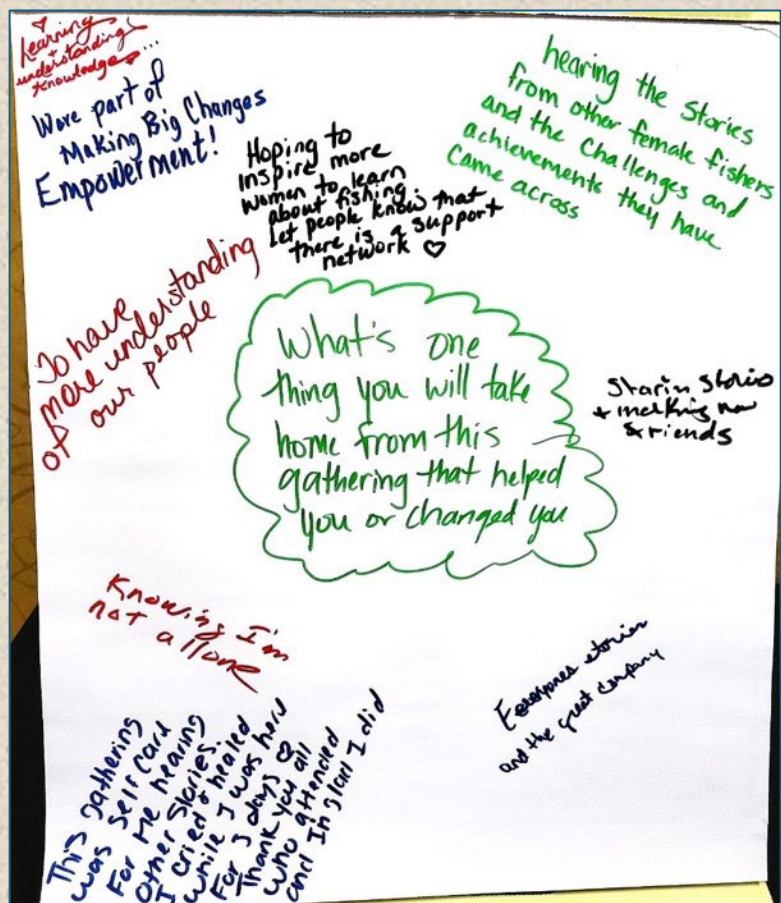
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Activities</b>
8:00 – 9:00am	<b>Breakfast</b>
9:00am – 12:00pm	<b>Talking and Barking a Quilling Knowledge Exchange</b> Quilling with Crystal (20 women) - Talking/sharing with Chief Sherry and Polina (20 women) - Resolution support available
10:30	<b>Break</b>
10:30- 12:00pm	<b>Continue of Talking and Barking a Quilling Knowledge Exchange</b>
12:00 – 1:00	<b>Lunch</b>
1:00 – 1:30pm	<b>Clearwater Presentation</b> - Cheryl Copage- Gehue
1:30 – 2:30pm	<b>Crafting and Knowledge Exchange</b> - Quilling with Crystal (20 women) -Talking/sharing with Chief Sherry and Polina (20 women) - Resolution support available
2:30 – 2:45pm	<b>Break</b>
3:00 – 4:00pm	<b>Switching of groups: Talking and Barking a Quilling Knowledge Exchange Session</b> - Quilling with Crystal (20 women) - Talking/sharing with Chief Sherry and Polina (20 women) - Resolution support available
4:00 – 5:00pm	<b>Break</b> - Free time



## Workshop Experiences



**What is one thing you will take home from this gathering that helped or changed you?**



What is one thing you are thankful for about this gathering?

Meeting new people, we all have fishing in common. We all are strong powerful women.

Having a voice as woman

Having to share experiences & challenges

Meeting and sharing stories with women from other communities and different roles in their communities

Meeting fisher women from other communities. Making new friends

What is one thing you are thankful for about this gathering

Meeting beautiful strong women. And making new friends

Sharing experiences & talks. Meeting new ppl. Spending time with them

~~Everyone~~  
Everyone's presence

Being on or near the water

Doing it with family

Time spent with your crew enjoying what we all love

Time with family & the water

Building memories...

What do you enjoy most about fishing

The faces of the people Receiving fresh sea food

Everything But Mostly Looking Strong for my grandchildren

Family Tranquility peaceful moments Practicing 1752!

I don't fish but I appreciate the work involved. Highest admiration for fishers

The beautiful sunsets & rises. Besides all hard work the peace.

What do you enjoy most about fishing?

# Final Report

## Experiences and Insights

### 1. Voices and Representation:

- Women expressed gratitude for having a platform to voice their experiences and challenges as women in the fishing industry. When asked: *What is one thing you are thankful for about this gathering?* the women responded (see pictures above):
  - Having a voice as a woman.
  - Having females to share experiences and barriers and challenges.
  - Meeting and sharing stories with women from other communities and different roles in their communities.
  - Everyone's presence.
  - Sharing experiences, talking, meeting new people.
  - Meeting beautiful strong women and making new friends.
  - Meeting fisherwomen from other communities, making new friends.
  - Meeting new people, we all have fishing in common, we all are strong powerful women.
- The opportunity to meet and share stories with other fisherwomen was highly valued. When asked: *What's one thing you will take home from this gathering that helped you or changed you?* the women responded (see pictures above):
  - Learning, understanding knowledge...
  - We're part of making big changes, empowerment!
  - Hoping to inspire more women to learn about fishing, let people know that there is a support network.
  - Hearing the stories from other women fishers and the challenges and achievements they have come across.
  - Sharing stories and making new friends.

- Everyone's stories and the great company.
- Knowing I'm not alone.
- This gathering was self-care for some by hearing other stories.
- To have more understanding of our people.

## 2. Empowerment and Change:

- The gathering was seen as a mechanism for change, empowering women to inspire others and to recognize existing support networks.
- Many women felt that hearing the stories of others helped them understand they were not alone in their struggles.

## 3. Connection to Fishing:

- Fishing was cherished for the tranquility of being on the water, and the satisfaction of providing nutritious food and support for their families and communities.
- There was a strong appreciation for the cultural and familial aspects of fishing.

# Challenges Identified

## 1. Financial Barriers:

- Acquiring and maintaining boats is financially challenging including:
  - Issues with securing access.
  - Not Treaty and cannot finance under Treaty.
  - Restrictions around food and trade.
- There is a need for better financial literacy and access to financial resources, including insurance and pensions for self-employed fisherwomen.

## 2. Training and Education:

- Access to necessary training is sporadic and often scheduled during peak fishing times.
- Women expressed the need for comprehensive training programs up to the captain level, including business management and safety training.

### **3. Support and Safety:**

- The lack of a safe port and vandalism of boats and equipment were major concerns.
- Women reported feeling unsupported by fisheries officers and facing systemic barriers in pursuing careers in fisheries enforcement. Women expressed that they felt they were made to look weak.
- Women reported inadequate equipment on boats and when going out fishing. Some reported:
  - Women need proper gear, safety gear, most of us work with our sneakers.

### **4. Gender Discrimination:**

- Women felt they were losing income opportunities due to gender discrimination and being outnumbered by men in the industry. Women noted their experiences when working with male colleagues / captains:
  - Other opportunities are not offered to women.
  - Women felt outnumbered and men are looking down at them.
  - That they were viewed as not strong enough as compared to men.
  - There are more educational opportunities for men.
  - It was noted how news outlets acknowledged a non native woman fishing with her husband for 30 years and not how native women who work harder.
  - In some instances, women became acknowledged by captains or their peers as being just as good men, if not better.
- There was a call to highlight and support men who are allies and mentors to women in the fishing community.

### **5. Family and Mental Health:**

- Women overwhelmingly noted that wanting to have or having a family impacted their choice to fish. However, balancing family responsibilities with fishing was a significant challenge including childcare while being away.
- It was noted that there is a lack of mental health support tailored to the unique stresses of Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters, including dealing with trauma and grief.

## *Challenges*



## Positive Outcomes and Suggestions

### 1. **Networking and Support:**

- Women suggested creating a women's fisher group on social media for regular networking and mutual support.
- Sharing contact information and keeping in touch with other fisherwomen was seen as beneficial.

### 2. **Childcare and Family Support:**

- Recommendations included providing childcare support during fishing seasons and organizing family-inclusive events.

### 3. **Education on Rights and Benefits:**

- There was a strong desire for training on treaty rights, financial benefits, and the logistics of maintaining a fishing business.
- Educating the broader community, including non-Indigenous fishers and officers, on Mi'kmaw treaty rights was deemed essential.

## Recommendations

### Immediate Actions

#### 1. **Establish Regular Networking Groups:**

- Facilitate monthly gatherings for fisherwomen to network, share experiences, and provide mutual support. These gatherings can include activities like beading and informal training sessions.

#### 2. **Provide Financial and Business Training:**

- Organize workshops on financial literacy, insurance, pensions, and business management tailored for fisherwomen. Ensure these are scheduled outside peak fishing times.

#### 3. **Enhance Safety Measures:**

- Advocate for the creation of a safe port for Mi'kmaw fishers. Increase security measures to prevent vandalism and theft of fishing gear.

#### **4. Support Family and Childcare Needs:**

- Develop initiatives to support fisherwomen with childcare during fishing seasons. Consider organizing cultural camps for children during these times.

#### **5. Address Mental Health:**

- Provide access to mental health resources, including trauma-informed care and crisis intervention training. Create safe spaces for fisherwomen to discuss their mental health needs.

### **Long-term Strategies**

#### **1. Promote Gender Equity:**

- Implement programs to support and mentor women in the fishing industry. Highlight successful female fishers and male allies in community gatherings and media.

#### **2. Improve Training Access:**

- Collaborate with training providers to ensure courses are available at convenient times for fisherwomen. Advocate for more frequent and accessible training sessions.

#### **3. Educate on Treaty Rights:**

- Conduct information sessions on Mi'kmaw treaty rights and how they relate to fisheries. Involve experts in these sessions to provide comprehensive knowledge and empower fisherwomen.

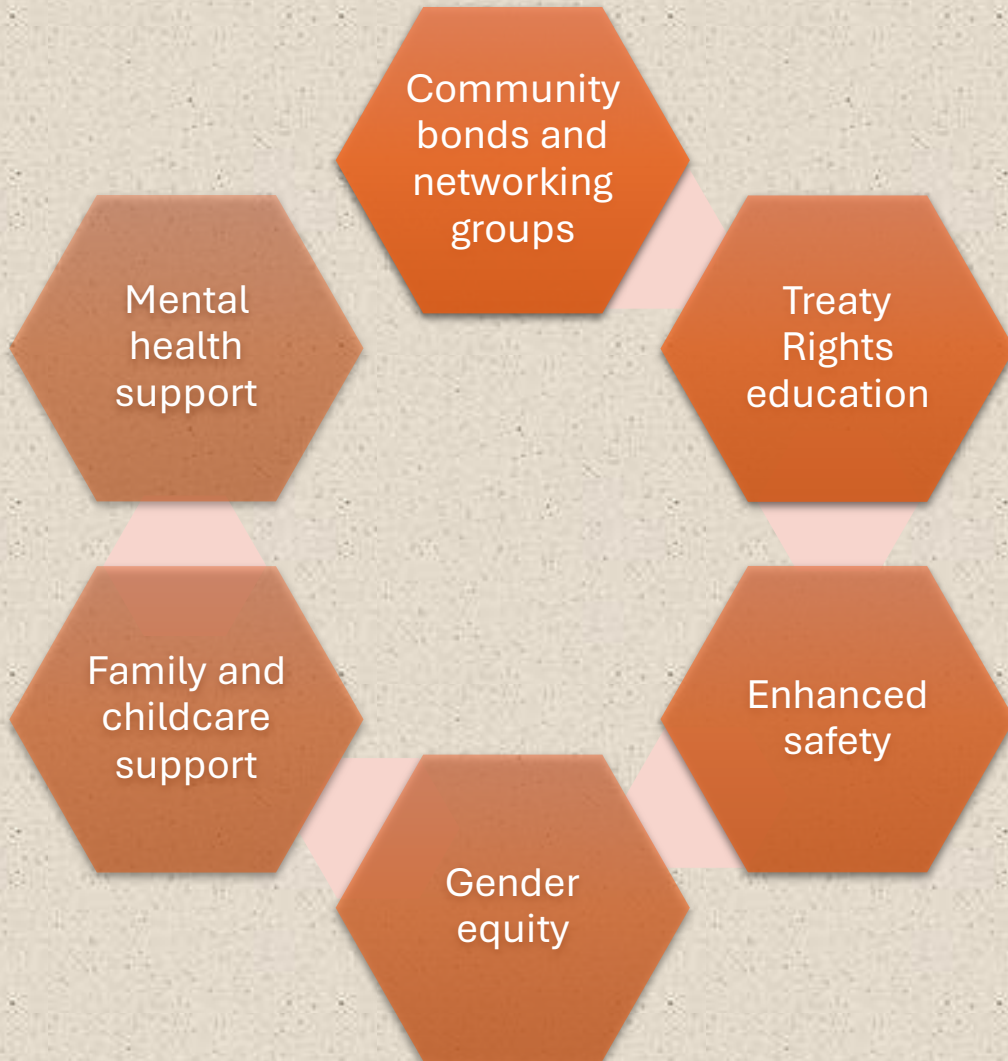
#### **4. Support Career Development:**

- Create pathways for fisherwomen to advance in their careers, including opportunities in fisheries enforcement and management. Provide support and training to help women overcome systemic barriers.

#### **5. Strengthen Community Bonds:**

- Encourage more inter-community gatherings to build solidarity among fisherwomen. Facilitate the exchange of traditional knowledge and best practices.

## *Recommendations*



## Moving Forward

As a step for moving forward, the gathering included a call for more in depth interviews by District Chief/Dr. Sherry Pictou and Post Doctoral Researcher, Dr. Polina Baum-Talmor. This research will complement the Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters Gathering with a focus on enhancing Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters' health and wellbeing.



## Atlantic Policy Congress of Chiefs Fisherwomen Award

The Atlantic Policy Congress of Chiefs (APC) have been hosting an annual APC Fisheries Conference & Awards for several years. One of the issues raised during the Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters Gathering, was how women were not acknowledged at this conference. This information was passed on to the APC and we are honoured that APC offered its first Indigenous Women Fish Harvesters Award in January 2025 and facilitated a panel, ***Exploring the Importance of Female Roles in Fisheries.***

## Wela'lioq

We wish to thank everyone who made this gathering possible, and we look forward to future gatherings and research that will enhance the health and wellbeing of Mi'kmaw/Indigenous Women Fish Harvesters.



## Affiliated Projects and Documents

Complementary Study. Outcomes forthcoming.



### STUDY WITH MI'KMAW WOMEN FISHERS

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by Dr Polina Baum-Talmor, who is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Dalhousie University and Dr Sherry Pictou, who is an Associate Professor at Dalhousie University and Honorary District Chief for the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq.

In this research study, we want to work with you to promote a Mi'kmaq/Indigenous approach to land and water governance (decision making) that is informed by the knowledge and perspectives of Mi'kmaq/Indigenous women's way of knowing. We are interested in working with you to advance research that will enhance fisher women's health and wellbeing.

In this research, we are inviting women who identify as Mi'kmaq and are involved in fishing activities (either food, ceremonial, livelihood or commercial), over the age of 18. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in an interview or conversation by the researcher which can last between 30-90 minutes, where the researcher will ask you if you agree for the conversation to be recorded. During this conversation, you will be asked questions about your community, about your fishing activities and about any challenges you had to deal with in carrying out those activities. In cases where possible, the researcher may ask for permission to accompany you for a day on the water and/or fishing activity. Compensation will be offered for your time.

Please reach out for more details  
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Sherry Pictou [sherry.pictou@dal.ca](mailto:sherry.pictou@dal.ca)

# Research Approach: Health and Gender Roles in Mi'kmaw/Indigenous Ocean and Water Governance

## Mi'kmaq-led Research on Gender, Health and Governance: The Case of Mi'kmaw Women Fish Harvesters in NS

District Chief / Dr. Sherry Pictou and Dr Polina Baum-Talmor  
with the support of the Mi'kmaw Chiefs of Nova Scotia

### BACKGROUND



Mi'kmaw fishers play a vital role in providing food for their communities and in Nova Scotia's economy.



Marginalization and systemic barriers have hindered Mi'kmaw fishers' productivity, economic participation, and well-being.



A preliminary study, which involved a gathering of Mi'kmaw women in Truro in February 2024, found that:

- 1** Women highlighted major issues in health and overall well-being.
- 2** There is a need for proactive, community-driven solutions for successful self-governance, decolonization, and reconciliation.
- 3** A critical gap exists in the interrelationship between socio-economic and health support systems for Mi'kmaw women fish harvesters.

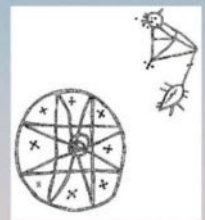
### METHODS

We propose a series of research projects that are rooted in Indigenous/participatory research methods, honoring Mi'kmaw ways of knowing. This includes collaborative research design, community engagement, and knowledge co-creation processes that respect Mi'kmaw sovereignty and self-determination.

### GOALS

Empower Mi'kmaw communities to restore agency in their ancestral lands and waters, building resilience and capacity towards decolonization, self-governance, sustainable development and prosperity.

Give voice to Indigenous women participating in various fisheries including food, ceremonial, moderate livelihood and commercial fishing.



### EXPECTED OUTCOMES



**Integration of Values:** Incorporate Mi'kmaw values like Etuaptmuk (Two-Eyed Seeing) and Netukulimk (sustainable livelihood) into the research framework.



**Empowerment:** Enable Mi'kmaw communities to define priorities, shape research agendas, and co-create knowledge.



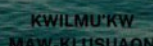
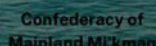
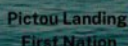
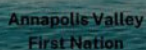
**Community Spaces:** Provide safe spaces for dialogue, healing, and community building among Mi'kmaw fishers.



**Mental Health Support:** Collaborate with Tajikeymik (Mi'kmaw Health and Wellness), mental health professionals, community organizations, and traditional healers to offer culturally sensitive mental health services.



**Policy and Education:** Develop policies and contribute to training programs that include maritime education, traditional knowledge, and treaty education.



# Wasoqopa'q Workshop March 2025: Report Forthcoming

March  
18-20  
2025

**Wasoqopa'q First Nation Fisherwomen  
Workshops**

DATES:

**MARCH 18-20 2025**

Accommodation: Tru by Hilton Yarmouth  
Address: 10588 Starrs Road, Yarmouth, B5A 5J7

Workshop Location: Rose Purdy Recreation &  
Community Centre in Yarmouth

Catering: Winners One Stop Restaurant Yarmouth