

# Listuguj First Nation

## Listuguj Fisheries, the Driving Force behind Economic Development

Written by Michael W. McDonald J.D.

Director of Economic Development with the Atlantic Policy Congress (APC)



Listuguj is a Mi'kmaq community located in the district of Kespékewaq (gess-pay-gay-way-gee). Kespékewaq translated into English is "The Last Land". Mi'kmaq territory, known to Mi'kmaq as Mi'kma'kik, was split into seven (7) districts. Kespékewaq is the largest of the seven (7) Mi'kmaq districts. Listuguj is the second (2<sup>nd</sup>) largest Mi'kmaq First Nation community in Mi'kma'kik with a total population around 4100 band members, over half of whom reside on-reserve.

Since the Marshall decision, the commercial fishery has been the main driver of economic growth and development for Listuguj First Nations as the money generated from the fisheries has allowed Listuguj to prosper. Moreover, a large number of community members are employed in fisheries. After the creation of their commercial fisheries, Listuguj maintained three main goals: the exercise of Mi'kmaq rights; sustainable employment for the members of the community; and the generation of profits to contribute to the social and economic well-being of the community.

When it come to exercising Mi'kmaq rights, Listuguj First Nations have always prided themselves on exercising their rights, especially their right to fish. This was made clear in 1981 after the Quebec Provincial Police (QPC) raided Listuguj First Nation as part of the efforts of the Quebec government to impose new restrictions on the harvesting of salmon by First Nations. The then Minister of Fisheries, Lucien Lessard, had felt that the Mi'kmaq of Listuguj were over-fishing salmon, even though the community's over all harvest of salmon was only a fraction of what was harvested by non-native commercial and recreational fisheries. As a result, hundreds of QPC in full riot gear, armed with police batons, assault rifles and shot guns raided the First Nation community in the early morning on June 11<sup>th</sup> and again on June 20<sup>th</sup>. A number of Listuguj community members were beat and arrested by police.



The raid drew national and international attention. Images of police marching down the streets, beating Listuguj community members with batons, seizing boats and other property, and ripping fishing nets to pieces were seen on news networks across Canada. Hundreds of First Nation people from across Canada and United States traveled to Listuguj to show their support. The day following the raid, the National Indian Brotherhood and All-Chiefs conference decided to move their meeting from Victoria British Columbia to the Listuguj First Nation. The Brotherhood, called upon the then Minister of Indian Affairs, John Munroe, to provide his take on the incident. Mr. Monroe stated that the Listuguj right to regulate their own fisheries overrides any provincial regulations.

The raid also stemmed the creation of the Salmon and Ranger fishing law:

[http://fngovernance.org/publication\\_docs/Listuguj\\_Mi-gmaq\\_Fishery\\_FINAL\\_Dec.15.pdf](http://fngovernance.org/publication_docs/Listuguj_Mi-gmaq_Fishery_FINAL_Dec.15.pdf).

Each year since the Marshall Decision, hundreds of community members are employed in commercial fisheries. During the 2016 to 2017 fishing seasons, Listuguj Fisheries held the largest crab fishing quota amount for First Nation communities in the Atlantic Provinces.



At present, Listuguj owns and operates seven (7) commercial snow crab vessels. Two (2) of the snow crab vessels are easily converted into shrimp fishing vessels during shrimp season, while the rest remain crab fishing vessels. Over 90% of the fishermen and women on the crab vessels are community members.

The band also owns a number of shrimp quotas and lobster quotas. The lobster season is divided into two (2) fisheries, Spring and Fall. The spring fishery is commercially regulated and the band holds four (4) licenses. 80% of the fishermen and fisherwomen in the commercial fisheries are community members.

The fall fishery is set aside for Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) fishery. The FSC fisheries mostly regulated by the Band and owns one (1) license that is separated into five hundred (500) traps/tags. The Band designates its own Rangers and enforcement to monitor fishing activities during the FSC fishery. One of the lobster boats owned by the band is set aside specifically for FSC fisheries and fishes one hundred and fifty (150) traps/tags and the remaining 350 tags are distributed to the community. Community members have the option to either fish it themselves or designate someone to fish it for them. All FSC lobster caught is distributed equally amongst community members throughout the community. 100% of the fishermen and fisherwomen on the lobster vessels during FSC fisheries are community members.

In keeping with their Community Comprehensive Planning Project, Listuguj First Nation has followed a management philosophy with the centre being sustainability.

Under this management philosophy model, Listuguj focuses on four pillars to maintaining sustainability. These are: economic, institutional, social and cultural, as well as ecological.



Under the economic pillar, the main driver as previously noted has been the commercial fishery.

The monies generated from the fishery has allowed Listuguj to prosper and grow. It also allowed Listuguj to increase business opportunities by investing in other ventures and expanding their revenues and profits.

One such venture involved farming mussels, however after a couple of seasons the Band felt this venture was not viable and converted the mussel farm operation into a scallop farm. This past winter the Band was able to harvest their first farmed scallops and packaged them under their own label. On the back side of their product label they added a nice introduction of who they are as Mi'kmaq people.



We, the coastal Mi'gmaq people have developed a profound relationship with the sea that strongly influenced our values and culture. Since time immemorial we believe in protecting the different species that nourishes our people. This principle is the foundation of the sustainable fisheries concept, now being adopted internationally.

**Wela'liq - Thank you**

Mi'gmaq and non-Mi'gmaq peoples worked together to bring this product to your table. Listuguj Fisheries is a communal enterprise guided by the responsibility of protecting the bounty of the sea for the next seven generations. The economic benefits from the operations helps to fund school programs, community services and cultural activities in Listuguj, our community.

To increase their marketability, Listuguj recently secured land along the provincial main highway. The land will be used for a band owned and operated seafood repackaging facility with a lobster and seafood store front. This economic development project is expected to employ at least twenty (20) community members. The seafood repackaging facility will also provide Listuguj the opportunity to purchase their own fish quotas for retail and wholesale markets.

In preparation for the repackaging facility, the Band in collaboration with Listuguj Fisheries and First Nation Regional Adult Education offered a certificate in semi-vocational training in Shellfish Repackaging. The program was accredited through the Minister of Education, Leisure and Sports of Quebec. Listuguj Band members participating in the training course have to complete five (5) months of classroom training and workshops along with fourteen (14) weeks of practical training at a shellfish repackaging facility.



One of Listuguj's most recent economic development ventures involved a significant investment into the medical marijuana company, Zenabis. Listuguj provided the company with a substantial dollar amount so it could expand its facility. In turn, Zenabis has provided Listuguj with shares into the company that would include shares in all present and future profits. With the legalization of marijuana just around the corner, this investment should turn out to be quite profitable for the community .



In keeping with the management philosophy model with their main goal to become self-sufficient and self-sustainable, Listuguj has grown significantly in all facets of their community. Institutionally, Listuguj now has their own policing service, health department, education, fire and emergency services, fisheries and forestry management. Over the last decade, Listuguj's vision of sustainability has become their reality.

