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Labrador Inuit Food, Social and Ceremonial Fishery

The traditional diet of Labrador Inuit primarily consisted of seal, caribou, salmon and char. At present, the Labrador Inuit Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) fishery is a trout, char and salmon net fishery which takes place in Northern and Central Labrador from May to August in a total of 7 communities. There are approximately 7500 Labrador Inuit of which one third reside in Central Labrador in the Lake Melville area in the communities of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and North West River, one third in the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area (LISA), in the communities of Rigolet, Makkovik, Postville, Hopedale and Nain and the other third reside elsewhere in Newfoundland Labrador, Canada and the world.

Each year, the Nunatsiavut Government has issued 8200 salmon tags for the FSC fishery. Each Labrador Inuit household is eligible to receive 1 licence with 7 salmon tags that can be harvested in the estuary of Lake Melville or in the LISA. The retention of salmon is only permitted from June 15th to August 31st with a mandatory weekly 24 hour take-up on Sunday as well as a 10 day closure in July for the Lake Melville area. 4000 tags are dedicated to the salmon fishery in Lake Melville while 4200 tags are distributed to the LISA communities. Of the 5 communities in LISA, 3 of the communities are in estuaries. The 2 most northern communities, Hopedale and Nain are considered to be in coastal waters as defined by DFO however it should be noted that these communities are sheltered by hundreds of islands and are 20 to 35 kilometers from open waters where the large salmon runs occur.

Unlike the other communities, the Nain and Hopedale FSC fishery primarily targets char. The majority of the nets are set from the shoreline or islands near the communities with few salmon being caught. It is estimated that only one third of the approximate 50 licence holders in Hopedale place target salmon as well as char. Only one licence holder travels away from the community to the outer islands for 1 to 2 weeks during summer months to harvest salmon. In Nain, about 15 of the estimated 60 licence holders seek out salmon at nearby islands, while the remaining licence holders harvest near the community for char.

In Makkovik, it is estimated that 75% of the fishery takes place in the estuary while 25% of the fishery takes place just outside the estuary on the coastline. Of the estimated 80 licence holders, there are approximately two licence holders that travel off the mainland to an island about 1 km away during 2 days in the summer to harvest salmon. The majority of licence holders in this community target trout, char and salmon.

It is estimated that 100 % of Postville's and Lake Melville's fishery takes place in estuaries while approximately 90% Rigolet's fishery takes place in estuaries. Postville's fishery targets char, trout and salmon while the fishery in Rigolet and Lake Melville target salmon and trout. There are 500 licences issued in the Lake Melville communities and 125 in Rigolet.