



INDIGENOUS SEAFOOD BUSINESS ACCELERATOR CELEBRATING 2024-25 GRADUATES





Members of the SBA are grateful to live, share experiences and work with a diverse team across the many traditional and unceded territories within British Columbia and beyond. We are honoured to acknowledge the original inhabitants of these lands and are committed to prioritizing reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty in our practices assisting the success of small-scale seafood entrepreneurship initiatives province wide.



WELCOME

We are honoured to showcase the first graduates of the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator (SBA).

The 2024-25 SBA cohort includes wild harvest and farmed seafood entrepreneurs from Indigenous communities across British Columbia. The Seafood Business Accelerator was created to help small-scale fishers and farmers capture more value for their harvests. It was piloted in 2023 through the Centre for Seafood Innovation at Vancouver Island University (VIU). When VIU exited, we partnered with Coastal Nations Fisheries and the T. Buck Suzuki Foundation to secure funding through New Relationship Trust and Island Coastal Economic Trust to offer an Indigenous focused SBA.

Small-scale seafood harvesters face significant challenges. Seafood has long been central to Indigenous food systems, yet climate change and globalization have led to declining harvester numbers and food insecurity. Given their socio-economic importance, it's critical to support these harvesters in overcoming barriers and seizing real opportunities.

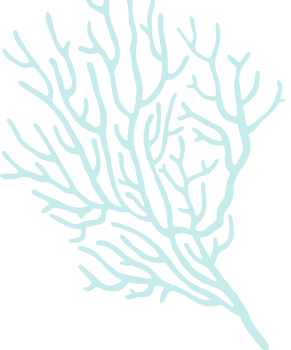
Seafood production—especially value-adding—offers immense potential for sustainable protein, economic growth, and food sovereignty in Indigenous communities. We must address the reality that BC exports 90% of its seafood while importing 80% from less pristine waters.

The SBA empowers Indigenous entrepreneurs to reclaim and strengthen their role in water-based food systems. We are incredibly proud of our graduates and their commitment to creating lasting impacts in their communities and beyond.

With immense pride,



Debra Hellbach & Olivia Alexander
SBA Founders & Delivery Team





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LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SEAFOOD BUSINESS ACCELERATOR PROGRAM & OUR TEAM OF EXPERTS







About the SBA

The Seafood Business Accelerator (SBA) empowers Indigenous seafood entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills and support needed for long-term success.

Our 4-month hybrid program combines online training with one-on-one coaching and mentoring, helping small-scale fishers, farmers, and processors launch or grow their businesses or community programs. Trainees receive expert guidance in market research, business planning, product development, marketing, grant writing, and more. A team of industry professionals provides tailored support.

The Future of the SBA

The SBA is currently led by contractors Debra Hellbach and Olivia Alexander and operates based on partner support and funding availability. We are working towards finding a permanent home for the SBA to ensure continued support for seafood entrepreneurs.

Pa'aje Shellfish LP
Grace Adams
Tla'amin



INNOVATION PLAN

 PROJECT FOCUS	<p>In addition to selling oysters and clams Pa'aje would like to grow and sell oyster and clam seed.</p> <p>Priority will be food security to Tla'amin Nation who wants to access as much of our shellfish product for communal use.</p> <p>Continued implementation of standard operating procedures and explore mentoring another Tla'amin member for both administrative role and beach work.</p>		
 MARKET RESEARCH	<p>Explore with senior fisheries staff the best beaches for Tla'amin to grow clams in our territory that includes easy access and high visibility so no poaching occurs.</p> <p>Rebranding to include local artists to do logo and renaming.</p> <p>New contract recently signed with Fanny Bay and implementing farming and harvesting methods based on their feedback.</p>	 REGULATIONS	<p>Licenses are in compliance for shellfish farming.</p> <p>Reviewing management plans for growing clam seed.</p>
 TARGET MARKET	<p>Oversee farmers for oyster seed. Tla'amin Nation for clams which would be put on beaches in front of former reserves.</p>	 FUNDING	<p>PICFI - 1,000,000 clam seed purchase.</p> <p>\$88,000 oyster infrastructure. Ongoing investment in infrastructure onsite. Gangway completed in Jan 2025 to access fluffy from shore. Next steps to build shelter around fluffy and purchase clam seed to grow. Building capacity by hiring a mentor/contractor.</p>
 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	<p>Grow and sell oyster and clam seed from our fluffy to local oyster farmers and clam seed to Tla'amin Nation for their beaches.</p> <p>Hiring Tla'amin members to work on the oyster and clam tenures.</p>	 DISTRIBUTION	<p>Completion of custom made boat mid Feb 2025 will take us away from renting which will increase revenue. We have been renting since 2019.</p>
 MARKETING ACTIVITIES	<p>Create messaging that the clams are for communal use at cultural centre and annual communal shellfish distribution.</p> <p>Oysters - connect with coop in Port Alberni for processing costs for oysters for Tla'amin communal use.</p> <p>We've connected with potential value-add partners and are exploring shelf-stable, high-value products to further enhance our offerings.</p>		
 BUSINESS SYSTEMS & OPERATIONS	<p>Traceability is implemented and improved paper trails are in place.</p> <p>File management is critical to ensure SOPs are accessible. They will allow growth of our team and continuity. Internally in place but need to create a shareable one, firewalls are very strict in our office.</p>		
 MILESTONES AND/OR NEXT STEPS!	<p>Stability for the business, diversify our product by introducing clam seed.</p> <p>Providing food security to Tla'amin Nation by increasing access to clams and utilizing the local commercial license holders to harvest the product to be stored in the Nation's traditional food building located next to cultural centre which will open June 2025.</p>		

Seafood Business Accelerator

February 6 2025

Harold Williams
Haide, Skidegate



INNOVATION PLAN

 PROJECT FOCUS	<p>Yahguadang (Respect Everything Around You) - the first step of processing anything is to respect the item you are processing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 ft processing unit in a new shipping container • Open and operate shop for added value and cold storage • Produce local Haide style seafood • Learn and understand processing, building and regulatory requirements • Consult with elders and mentors for guidance 		
 MARKET RESEARCH	<p>Continue to survey existing customers (+1000) and tourists to learn preferred products, general buyer data and pricing feasibility.</p> <p>Ongoing research on key terms for marketing, industry trends, fishing certifications and fishing standards by similar fisheries and value-add processors.</p>	 REGULATIONS	<p>Seafood, health & safety regulations include First Nations Health Authority, provincial and federal CFIA.</p> <p>General licensing regulations and requirements as a vendor, buyer and processor.</p>
 TARGET MARKET	<p>A. Selling finished product of vacuum packed, smoked or candied seafood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Band office and Council of the Haide Nation for etors and community food fish, visitors and locals <p>B. Selling the service of processing catch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent sport fishers that want special processing; fishing outfitters, local fishers who catch but don't process themselves. 	 FUNDING	<p>Funding streams: Farm Credit Canada, Community Futures, New Relationship Trust, Food sovereignty grants, Gwaii Trust, TRCOP, Native Fishing Association</p>
 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmon will be cut and bagged in 1 lb portions (vacuum sealed, documented, and processed under sanitary conditions). • Salmon is cut into strips so ready to fit into jars and be used to expand product line. • Find different areas and tap into different methods of Haide styled fish. 	 DISTRIBUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially focus on local sales to maintain a strong community presence • Establish designated delivery days for consistent and reliable service; Leverage airports and ferry systems to expand reach and streamline logistics • Hire additional delivery drivers during peak demand periods; Involve my son in the delivery process to provide flexible support when needed
 MARKETING ACTIVITIES	<p>Continue to focus on social media and word of mouth driven by giveaways, values-based donations and design contests with local artists.</p> <p>Tourism BC & promoting local Haide food culture</p> <p>Partner with local sports fishing guides</p> <p>Discounts for purchasing with cryptocurrency</p> <p>Online harvesting and processing classes including youth groups</p>		
 BUSINESS SYSTEMS & OPERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate under rights-based fisheries • Utilize local mosquito fleets and harvesters to source varied selection of local seafood processing techniques. • Inventory control for sales data and revenue, and to analyze top selling products • Customer database 		
 MILESTONES AND/OR NEXT STEPS!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm location for processing plant • Consult local government • Work with First Nations Health Authority on regulations and Nation to Nation sales • Decision on initial processing style and packaging • Ongoing market research on regulations, standards and funding • Finalize start-up costs: purchase of container and shipping/upgrades • Continue to meet with elders and mentors to utilize their skills and professions 		

Seafood Business Accelerator

February 6 2025

SBA Innovation Plans can be presented to potential buyers, investors, or financiers to quickly help them understand projects.

Graduate Showcase 2024/2025



SBA JOURNEY

SEAFOOD BUSINESS ACCELERATOR TIMELINE



1
INTRO-
DUCTIONS

**INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP
AT DEEP BAY MARINE FIELD STATION
OCTOBER 10, 2024**









2
LEARNING
& PLANNING

**VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS & WEBINARS
WORKED WITH COACHES TO DEVELOP PLAN**

WORKSHOPS
Money Matters
Capturing Opportunities
Marketing & Distribution
Regulations, Production, & Marketing

WEBINARS
Success Story: Flurer Smokery
Marketing Strategies
Grant Writing 101
NFA Microloans











3
PROJECT
IMPLEMEN-
TATION

INNOVATION PLAN
TRAINEES WORKED WITH EXPERTS,
COACHES, AND SBA TEAM TO DEVELOP AN
INNOVATION PLAN, A ROADMAP TO GUIDE
THEIR PROJECT





4
COMMUNICATING
RESULTS

**SBA SHOWCASE
AT VIU NANAIMO
FEB 6, 2025**

SBA TRAINEES SHOWCASE
THEIR PLANS, NETWORK, AND
CELEBRATE THEIR GRADUATION
FROM THE PROGRAM

All participants will be included in digital marketing brochure to be emailed after the event.



Harold Williams

Independent Harvester

Haida, Skidegate

The joy of gathering is what feeds Harold (although he did also share that he is an aspiring TV star). Providing for the Elders is an important part of Indigenous culture and a strong message from his own father. When the Elders can no longer get out on the beach or need to spend time in hospital, Harold believes they should always have access to their primary food source and eat the quality seafood they are accustomed to.

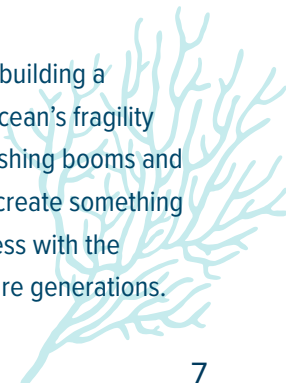
Harold shares how the Elders encouraged him to embrace the economic potential of seafood harvesting by offering financial support, which he resisted but eventually accepted. As he honed his skills, word of his harvesting expertise spread, leading him to expand his operations and sell not only to the local community but also to tourists. Harold's services are also in demand for harvesting invasive European Green Crab, something he has become a specialist in on Haida Gwaii. Overwhelmed by the growing demand for his services, Harold is grateful for the training and resources provided by the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator (ISBA), which are enabling him to scale up his business and meet the needs of his customers.

Harold had a serious accident last year but feels it happened for a reason as he shifts from rights-based fisheries into a commercial venture. He now prioritizes setting up a successful seafood business on traditional land.

Harold is focused on managing finances and building a sustainable business that honours both the ocean's fragility and the lessons of the past. Inspired by the fishing booms and busts he has witnessed, he is determined to create something enduring—one that balances economic success with the stewardship of the marine ecosystem for future generations.

Harold wants to feed his people. He wants his children to be able to do the same. Living on Haida Gwaii, Harold's focus has always been to simply fulfill the demand for fresh seafood in his community. We spoke while he was preparing a huge batch of fish and chips for the First Nations Village Team – All Native Basketball Fundraiser.

Harold has been harvesting seafood on Haida Gwaii as long as he can remember. Although he spent his early childhood in Prince George with his mother, he loved going “home to Haida Gwaii” to play in nature, fish minnows, harvest octopus or clams and head out in his little boat. He learned everything from his relatives including filleting, smoking, flavouring and presenting. He is now passing this knowledge along to his own sons.





Conrad Brown Independent Harvester

Haítzaqv, *Bella Bella*

Conrad was introduced to the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator (ISBA) through Leona Humchitt who participated in the first SBA in the spring of 2023. He is interested in developing ideas of adding value to his seafood harvest rather than just moving the raw product from this rich territory. He plans to use traditional methods and flavours and believes cold-smoked is the way to go. Conrad wants to develop recipes and methods of smoking for less conventional types of fish such as black cod which hold an inordinate amount of oil.

Working with several SBA Mentors has helped solidify the opportunities for value added seafood and contributed to better understanding the technical requirements to produce safe, quality foods. His ISBA business coach is helping Conrad to focus on achievable goals and number crunching. “It might make more sense for me to build a small smoke house on my property and utilize the existing and underutilized fish plant in Bella Bella for primary processing and packaging,” Conrad admits. “My coach has helped me see that this would reduce costs and increase my capacity.”

Conrad plans on branding his business, hiring support and eventually exporting to the rest of Canada. He wants to start small and plans to begin with cold-smoking catch for local fishing lodges. Along the way he wants to commercially insure his boat and prepare it for tourism, offering his smoked products to clients.

Bella Bella blends traditional living with modern comforts. It is an intriguing destination with a rich cultural heritage. Conrad intends to find ways increase value on the bounty harvested from the clear waters by both gaining and sharing knowledge as has been done by the Haítzaqv people who have inhabited this area for millennia.

Conrad Brown lives in remote Bella Bella, home to the Haítzaqv people and the largest First Nations community on BC’s west coast. Bella Bella is located on Campbell Island at the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest. Conrad began fishing with his father on their commercial vessel and a long line of fishermen precedes him. After completing the Aboriginal Eco Tourism Program with Vancouver Island University, Conrad is searching for ways to integrate fishing and tourism on the rich waters of the pacific.

Currently he is employed as a Guardian Watchman, patrolling the coast, surveying for prawn and crab, mapping kelp beds, collecting data and ensuring visitors follow regulations. Our conversation took place while he patrolled in his own vessel, monitoring the commercial clam diggers.



Grace Adams **Pa'aje Shellfish LP**

Tla'amin, Powell River

Grace approached the SBA program with many ideas, recognizing the potential of Tla'amin's prime beach locations, deep-water tenures, and various fishing licenses. A key challenge she identified is the lack of access to a Canadian Food Inspection Agency-certified processing facility on the sunshine coast—a critical step in moving products to market.

Through the SBA program, Grace connected with coaches, mentors, and fellow participants. One notable connection was Bretton Hills, a 2023 SBA graduate who operates Ondine Ocean Farm on the unceded territory of the Tla'amin and Sechelt Nations. Their discussions identified shared dreams of developing an accessible processing facility—a crucial resource for both communities.

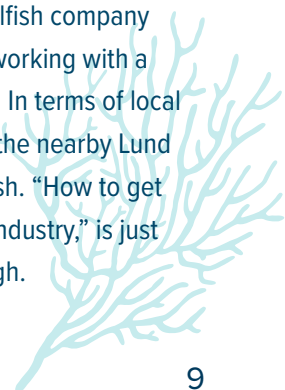
For the ISBA innovation plan Grace will be focusing on growing oyster seed to supply to other farmers. This could be replicated for clams. As Powell River and the Tla'amin community grow in population, Grace recognizes another challenge is to be a competitive employer due to the thriving local construction economy.

The Tla'amin Nation has been exploring access to traditional food sources and have developed programs around food preservation and practical field experience. They have recently built a 'food building' for communal use, right next to the cultural center where oysters and clams could be safely stored and prepared for traditional gatherings.

Grace is working towards rebranding the shellfish company and accessing local markets. She is already working with a local artist on a logo and marketing materials. In terms of local markets, Grace knows tourist operations like the nearby Lund Hotel would be very interested in local shellfish. "How to get seafood from our area into the local tourism industry," is just one of the challenges Grace is working through.

Grace Adams is a lifelong learner and dedicated go-getter. She lives and works on the Tla'amin Nation where she is employed as Lands & Resources Manager by Tla'amin Management Services LP, the business arm of the self-governing nation. Grace studied political science at UVIC and after returning home she began work as a Treaty Manager, overseeing the negotiations as Tla'amin Nation transitioned from the Indian Act to a Treaty Nation in 2016.

Grace has the huge task of growing the Tla'amin Nation's shellfish operation. The learning curve has been steep as the nation's business arm re-enters the competitive shellfish market. To learn more about the seafood supply chain, Grace joined the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator (ISBA) program. "If only this program was offered 5 years ago!" she tells me.





Vanessa Bellis

Independent Harvester

Haida, Masset

grants and programs. “It has been eye opening to see the opportunities, the projects that can take place,” she says.

ISBA coaches and mentors have been great at informing trainees about market opportunities, complex processing regulations, refining marketing strategies and funding options. As Vanessa puts it, “Harvesting is one thing, but learning and understanding what happens after harvest is so important.”

Vanessa has centred her project around the invasive European Green Crab (EGC). She is working on a crab stock to be sold in concentrate. Federal regulations do not currently allow commercial harvest of EGC. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans invasive species regulations do not permit any economic development when it comes to invasives—this is just one of her challenges. But Haida Gwaii, having received title in 2024, is in a strong position to change these regulations.

Food sovereignty and food security are a high priority for Vanessa. She recently connected with Harold Williams (another ISBA trainee) who is an expert harvester of EGC. Harold is working towards an Indigenous owned shop for local seafood on Haida Gwaii. “It’s one of the saddest things, you can’t buy fresh seafood products here,” Vanessa says, “... and it should be a Haida making that possible.”

Vanessa and her husband are encouraging their children to find a balance of formal education, traditional knowledge and future planning. Coming from a matrilineal society she will continue to fight the stigma of women being in charge and proudly descends from a line of strong, resilient Haida women. Vanessa is putting in the work to figure out her next steps and we end the conversation laughing about a new recipe for a dirty green crab martini. Apparently it’s already a thing.

Vanessa Bellis is proud of her ancestry and alert to the opportunities and challenges facing the Haida Nation. As the first female Haida commercial diver she carries deep respect for the ocean and the unique nature of the archipelago Haida Gwaii. Vanessa lives in Masset where she is raising 4 children in the house her father built many years ago. Currently in transition, Vanessa is testing the waters with an entrepreneurial hand after many years with Haida fisheries.

Vanessa joined the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator program (ISBA) with encouragement from an old friend and fellow commercial diver Lawrence Anderson. Lawrence graduated from the first SBA program in 2023 with his innovative uni-butter product (an urchin/butter formula sold in specialty seafood shops). She says her biggest take-away so far is that the community on Haida Gwaii needs to work together and know there is support through government



Troy Moth

Ama Luudisk Seafarms

Metlakatla, Prince Rupert

It's not all smooth sailing. The Regenerative Ocean Farm has taken over a former scallop farm that went bankrupt, leaving Troy with the massive task of distributing millions of scallops before they age out. Adding to the pressure, live scallops have a short shelf life—just five days, compared to oysters' two-plus weeks.

“We have a lot to sell and are running out of time,” Troy explains. To tackle these challenges, he joined the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator (ISBA) in search of solutions for extending scallop shelf life. His focus includes promoting the benefits of frozen seafood, comparing modified atmosphere packaging with high-pressure processing, and investigating other technical innovations.

The ISBA provides a wealth of knowledge and networking opportunities. “Chelsea (Chelsea Sang, ISBA coach) really knows what she's talking about,” Troy shares. “It's reaffirming to see industry professionals recognize our challenges and offer solutions.”

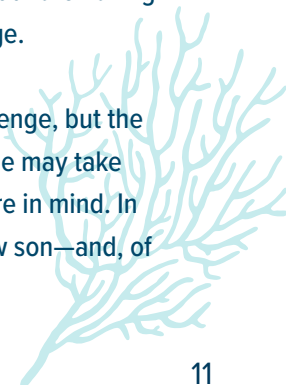
Looking ahead, Troy envisions a smaller-scale, more diverse approach to ocean farming. Tasked with trying to figure out next steps, he wants to focus on producing species that support community tradition.

As Troy develops ideas around the nation's long-term vision and values, he is looking into farming black seaweed, a BC version of Japanese nori. Metlakatla has historically had the best wild stocks of black seaweed, which could be an opportunity as many communities farther south are having issues with their stocks due to climate change.

For now, Troy is focused on the scallop challenge, but the seaweed idea simmers in the background. He may take the ISBA program again with this new venture in mind. In the meantime, he's enjoying life with his new son—and, of course, selling scallops.

Troy Moth has landed in a place that feels good. Over the past few years Troy and his partner have moved all over British Columbia, finally heading “down the Skeena River” from Terrace to Prince Rupert for an opportunity to work with Metlakatla First Nation and Ecotrust Canada on a regenerative ocean farming pilot project.

Troy is an award winning photographer, film maker, entrepreneur, and artist. In 2017, Troy founded and operated a 186 acre Creative Campus in Nootka Sound and began dreaming of ocean farming. Now, as a new father and as Operations Manager for Ama Luudisk Seafarms, a kelp and shellfish farm owned and operated by Metlakatla First Nation, he's living that dream—just in a slightly different form. He finds working with the Metlakatla Nation refreshing, as their focus is on long-term strategy, sustainability, and innovation rather than solely revenue.





Forrest Charles K'awat'si Shellfish Company

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, Port Hardy

After spending years in cold storage where the work was not steady or satisfying, he is now in an office moving into a sales and marketing role with the support and training of his boss, Al Blackford, the General Manager of K'awat'si Fisheries. Their primary product is the GwiGwi Oyster, named after the traditional Ba'kwam word for the oystercatcher bird, and one of the most northerly oysters in British Columbia. "It's a different vibe, but I'm getting used to it," he notes playfully.

Forrest joined the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator (ISBA) to build his understanding of seafood sales and marketing. Recognizing he has much to learn, he is gaining invaluable knowledge to become an effective salesperson for KEDC. Under the guidance of his boss, Al, and with support from ISBA coaches, presenters, and mentors, Forrest is building and reinforcing these critical skills.

When asked about traditional knowledge Forrest spoke of the healing effects of the land and the water, the importance of being in nature and finding peace after "some bad spaces in life." Camp life, his previous work, offered long periods of being surrounded by nature and he developed deep friendships, "I grew a lot during that time." His grandparents were trappers and raised him and his siblings. They spent a lot of time "up north in the woods, living off the land."

"Leading by example is important for the younger generations," Forrest says, reflecting on drug and alcohol abuse, youth not believing in themselves and a lack of hope. Homelessness in northern Saskatchewan, like many places, is increasing. "There's people there that I have somehow inspired to do better. I never really expected that, they look up to me on my reserve."

Forrest is determined to continue learning and working with the KEDC. He is carving a way out for himself in a sustainable and important industry. The ISBA is helping him get him where he wants to go faster than he could on his own.

Forrest Charles has done the unexpected and is making a success of it. After growing up in Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Northern Saskatchewan he moved to Port Hardy on Vancouver Island where he began working in a shellfish processing plant – gathering knowledge of the seafood sector. Initially the ocean was both scary and exciting and seafood was not part of his diet. Making the most of his new environment, he soon qualified for an SVOP (Small Vehicle Operator Proficiency Certificate), familiarizing himself with the ocean and becoming more valuable as an employee.

Forrest is currently employed by K'awat'si Fisheries part of K'awat'si Economic Development Corporation (KEDC), located in the heart of the ancestral territory of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nations. He says, "I don't think I've ever been with a company that treats me this good. They want to lift people up, not put them down."



Frank and Kathy Brown **YuWala Marine Charters**

Haítzaqv, Bella Bella

to stay in relationship with their aquatic environment and to capitalize on the seasonal nature of fishing.

Through his participation in the ISBA Frank is looking to both share and gather knowledge of the seafood sector to inform his decision around investing in another vessel. Primarily a dive fishing vessel, but also a potential charter or research boat, with which to support their existing eco-tourism enterprise. “With climate change, all the stocks are low,” Kathy says. With dive fisheries in mind, a multi-purpose dive vessel would be one more way to diversify their portfolio.

Frank has both driven and participated in various cultural videos and exhibitions. One of which focused on the important annual event of collecting herring roe on kelp. Frank wrote and narrated this beautiful short film in the hopes that it would support the expansion and diversification of their local markets (YouTube): [Heiltsuk Herring Roe on Kelp](#)

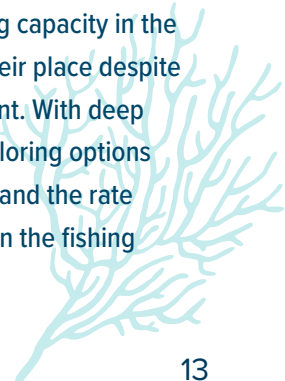
Frank and Kathy Brown are prodigious entrepreneurs. They are playing an important role in the preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture and rights. As educators with a history of maritime commerce and trade, they have a lot to offer in bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Along with many extended family members, they live in the coastal community of Bella Bella located in the heart of the Haítzaqv Nation and the Great Bear Rainforest. Bella Bella faces significant challenges as settler colonialism and resource extraction continues to encroach on traditional territories.

Despite various business and leadership roles taking Frank and Kathy’s attention and time, they joined the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator program (ISBA) with the intention of diversifying further. They are exploring economic opportunities

Frank and Kathy consider themselves “practitioners of the conservation economy” and continue to explore the viability of sustainable fisheries. “When the resources go, people leave. These are our home waters and we’ll always be here,” Frank says. Indigenous societies were historically built on sustainability. Frank explains, “We want to move back to that space. Not just have people coming in, extracting and leaving. We want our community members who reside in these spaces to be the beneficiaries of a sustainable and circular economy.”

Looking to the future, they talk about building capacity in the community for the next generation to take their place despite the radical changes in the marine environment. With deep sensitivity and care, Frank and Kathy are exploring options considering the seasonality of ocean bounty and the rate of climate change. There are no guarantees in the fishing business.





Morgan York & Gene Antoine Nexta Seafood

Tla-o-qui-att, Victoria

Clam digging was where it all started. Growing up in East Sooke near the Sooke First Nation on a small peninsula, Morgan York began his seafood harvesting career with generational clam diggers. Starting with those little manila and little neck clams he scratched out on the beach, he now deals with underwater geoduck clams pulled from their beds with hose gear, surface air supply and powerful boats.

Morgan York and his business partner Gene Antoine have teamed up under the name Nexta Seafood and have the combined experience and drive to move business forward.

They are focused on the dive fisheries, scuba diving for urchins, sea cucumber and geoduck. Morgan captains three boats, has equipped himself as a diver, and learned boat mechanics out of remote necessity. The physicality of the work as well as family responsibilities have pushed Morgan and Gene to explore their options.

They heard about the Indigenous Seafood Business Accelerator Program (ISBA) from a previous program trainee. Their original intention was to learn more about licensing and regulation but soon realized they could gain more value from the program by focusing on value adding to their geoduck; smoked, bacon-cured, ceviche, or canned for export are just some of their ideas.

“The group setting of the ISBA has given me motivation to move forward,” Morgan tells me, “And given rise to new ideas such as potential uses for waste, of which

there is very little.” There is no by-catch in the dive fisheries as the harvest is individually picked.

During the program Gene received a license for an additional 25,000lbs/year of geoduck. This means he has more dive work for the year while Morgan can diversify with boat mechanics and captaining other vessels.

Their long-term goal of exporting smoked geoduck to Europe, where they have assessed a clear demand for canned product, has been developed through their ISBA innovation plan. Alder smoked clams were traditionally one of the staples for the coastal First Nations, stored on cedar, a natural bacterial deterrent.

Additionally, Morgan and Gene are planning a legacy program to train new divers, encouraging local career building. The learning model would be like a practicum as there is a vast array of practical skills that can't be taught without hands on experience.

Morgan sounds positive about doing what they do best and ends with “... and I'm still a clam digger, ironically right?”

Other SBA Participants

In addition to the featured SBA graduates, many others benefited from SBA training and resources. Below is a sample of people that received support through the Indigenous SBA 2024-25 program.

Michelle Robinson | Klahoose

Paul Robinson | Ahousaht

Kerby Sampson | Laxkw'alaams

Craig Summers | Prince Rupert

Byron Charlie | Ahousaht

Erika Stocker | Haida

Linda Innes | Gitxaala

Brad Mercer | Nisga

Russell Robinson | Nuuchahnulth







Seafood Business Accelerator TEAM 2024-25

Each Seafood Business Accelerator trainee is matched with a business coach who works with the trainee to focus on an achievable project using an SBA Innovation Plan canvas as a guide. This single-page roadmap helps trainees hone in on what they want to work on and with whom.

SBA Coaches and Mentors work as a team to help move trainees' plans forward. Subject matter experts are brought in as needed.

MENTORS

Bruce Wallinger, Seafood Marketing

Vanessa Daether, Market Research

Ellie Scott, Development Chef

Sean Xia, Regulations & Construction

Lara Tiro, Product Development & Packaging

Trevor Cootes, Economic Development & Marketing

Andrew Tait, Natural Health Products

Desiree Baker, Grant Writing

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Bernard Gilbert, Guest Speaker, Financing

Kelly Flurer, Guest Speaker, Flurer Smokery

Sonia Strobel, Guest Speaker, Skipper Otto

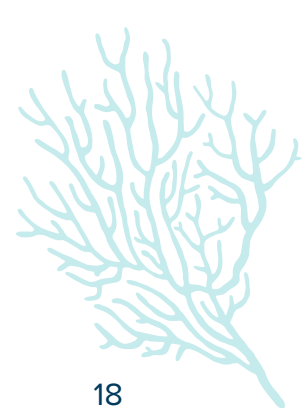
Dave Moore, Guest Speaker, Authentic Indigenous Seafood

Laura Peet, Guest Speaker, Smart Catch

Corey Peet, Guest Speaker, Sustainability

Fiona MacRaid, Guest Speaker, Financing

Jon Crofts, Guest Expert, Retail, Slow Food Movement





SUPPORT TEAM

Debra Hellbach
Manager

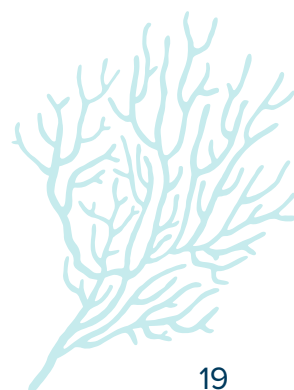
Olivia Alexander
Program Coordinator

Brady Calancie
Advisor

Chelsea Sang
Business Coach

Allison Boulton
Business Coach

Josephine Olivier
Photographer & Writer



PARTNERS AND FUNDERS



CONGRATULATIONS
2025 SEAFOOD BUSINESS ACCELERATOR
TRAINEES & SUPPORT TEAM