



## Who Benefits from Research? The Need for a Fisheries Research Protocol

*“Scientists have screwed us too many times before, and I’m tired of all of the surveys. I’ve contributed to science plenty of times before.”*

*“I’m not interested in doing this because I think that the more surveys I do the worse off I get.”*

- *comments made by fishermen from Richmond and Guysborough Counties when refusing to participate in a social science research project, April 2001.*

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### *Research in Whose Interests?*

Scientific research often requires that surveys and interviews be carried out with individuals who have no control over the research process. Their participation is frequently solicited through a description of the likely benefits of the research project, which might include improved knowledge on a given topic, or perhaps the use of research information to improve public policies of one kind or another. Yet, many who have participated in fisheries-related research report that they rarely receive feedback about the research project, and are not informed about any benefits that may have resulted.

Without feedback participants can be left feeling that they have been manipulated to provide information that leaves them more vulnerable than may otherwise have been the case. As evident in the above quotations, this situation is resulting in clearly expressed refusals to participate in research. In refusing, people are also acknowledging that ‘information is power’. For instance, information provided to ‘outsiders’ may be perceived to create threats to livelihoods and to independence, thereby deepening vulnerabilities to outside regulation and other sorts of intrusions.

This is a very serious issue. Research is critical to developing a better understanding of many important issues, and better understandings are essential, for example, to developing more responsive and effective public policy. Nevertheless people are quite justified in refusing to participate in research when it is not clear what sorts of implications the research has for their livelihoods, interests and concerns.

**What then are the obligations and responsibilities of those who do research with respect to those who participate in research?** What measures can be taken to ensure that people participating in research receive feedback and knowledge of any benefits? What measures would assist in further developing public understanding of research? And, what steps can be taken to provide research participants with the opportunity to define research priorities, processes and outcomes, and thereby benefit more directly from the research project?

## *Research in Whose Interests?*

Today, most research involving people, when it originates from universities, non-governmental organisations, and government agencies, must go through a formal ethics review before research begins. At universities, for instance, researchers are required to submit documents to an ethics review committee outlining the research and its procedures. These documents will specify how potential participants are to be informed about the research project, how confidentiality will be guaranteed, and will state whether participants are to be provided with summary reports of research results and so on.

### **Research Agreements**

*Memorandum Of Understanding* between The British Columbia Fisheries Commission, The University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre and The University of British Columbia First Nations House of Learning  
[www.fisheries.ubc.ca/Aborig/mou.htm](http://www.fisheries.ubc.ca/Aborig/mou.htm)

*Statement Of Professional Ethics* for the Canadian Sociologists and Anthropologists Association  
<http://alcor.concordia.ca/~csaa1/eng/englcode.htm>

*Research Protocol and Understanding* of the Social Research For Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) Project, between social researchers from St. Francis Xavier University, other university-seated associated researchers and community partners  
<http://www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf/2002b.htm>

*Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* describes the policies of the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), in Canada.  
<http://www.sshrc.ca/english/programinfo/policies/Intro01.htm>

*Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North* was developed and is used by the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies  
<http://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/~agraham/ethics.htm>

If aware of these documents, people being approached to participate in research could request either to review or to receive copies of them before agreeing to participate. This could assist individuals in making an informed decision as to whether or not to participate in the research. It would also provide them with knowledge of where to go later with complaints and queries if the researcher's promises are unfulfilled. The ethics review process, however, is intended mainly to ensure that researchers advise research participants fully and honestly about the nature and purposes of their research, and do not deceive them in any way. It does not *require* that researchers provide copies of research reports to those participating in the study, unless the researcher has specifically committed to do so. Notably, researchers are neither expected nor required to inform participants about the ethics committee process, let alone provide them with copies of the ethics review documents.

## *First Nations Are Leading the Way*

While people from all backgrounds are affected by these issues, Canada's First Nations, including the Mi'kmaq, appear to be leading the way when it comes to finding solutions. Many First Nations have now developed *Research Protocols* that define the procedures to be followed by persons or institutions desiring to conduct research within their communities.

First Nations' initiatives in this area have arisen from several interconnected sources. Among these:

1. Many aboriginal people are simply sick and tired of being treated as 'objects' studied by 'outsiders', with little or no recognisable benefit for them or their communities.
2. They are also fed-up with having outside researchers write books and journal articles that, in some cases, they think misrepresent their societies in important ways.
3. They are also concerned about the loss of intellectual property rights that occurs when outsiders gain access to aboriginal knowledge and then use that knowledge for personal profit. Pharmaceutical companies, for instance, have used aboriginal knowledge about medicinal plants to develop and patent new drugs, but without the permission of aboriginal people and without paying any royalties. Further, research information about traditional land use practices has also been gathered from aboriginal people and then used against them in court cases dealing with aboriginal rights.

In Nova Scotia the Mi'kmaq Nation has developed

*Mi'kmaq Research Principles and Protocols*

and a procedure whereby persons or institutions desiring to conduct research in a Mi'kmaq community are required to submit an application following the requirements laid out in the Research Protocol. The application is submitted to the Mi'kmaq Ethics Committee, who then decide whether or not the research goes forward and with what modifications.

To find out further information about this Research Protocol contact the Mi'kmaq Ethics Committee at the:

Mi'kmaq College Institute  
University College of Cape Breton  
PO Box 5300  
Sydney, Nova Scotia  
B1P 6L2

Tel: 902 563 1827

The *Research Protocols* developed by First Nations recognise that 'knowledge is power' and take the position that research be allowed only when there are clear and definite benefits for the First Nation involved. The full implications of research must be considered before permission is granted and the accountability, obligations, and responsibilities of the researcher must be clearly defined. Many First Nations also want to ensure that research projects within their communities address issues that are important to them. Further, First Nations want assurances that they will receive or have unconditional access to copies of all data gathered and all reports based on that data. Finally, there is a deep concern that the research process show respect for and, where possible, embody the ethos and cultural values of participating First Nations. These concerns and issues are not relevant only to First Nations. They are equally pertinent to most individuals and groups being routinely asked to participate in research.

### *What is a Research Protocol?*

A research protocol is a formal agreement negotiated between all parties potentially engaged in a specific research undertaking and process. Those initiating the research are obligated to identify and to negotiate the terms and conditions of the proposed research with the appropriate representatives of the communities, organisations, and/or peoples potentially affected and involved.

The research protocol developed through this process would specifically detail terms and conditions such as:

- the issues being researched
- the purpose of the research
- the methodology or methodologies being employed
- procedures respecting provision for obtaining informed consent and for assuring confidentiality
- the timeframe in which the research is to be conducted
- the physical and human sites where the research is to be conducted
- sharing of all information
- archival arrangements for the storage of information
- participation in data analyses and other interpretive uses of the information gathered
- participation in the review of all outcomes from the research including reports, media articles, scholarly papers, and monographs prior to their public release and circulation
- obligations to circulate and to provide copies of all final draft research outcomes among protocol signatories
- specification of the conditions wherein the relationships and understandings documented within the protocol may be terminated
- development of research funding proposals
- arrangements under which a portion of research funds would be used to provide training, employment opportunities, and equipment for participants, their communities or representative associations.

A research protocol based on these types of terms and conditions transforms the research process into a dynamic collaboration of equal partners. Which is to say that research that is respectful and considerate of all participants' concerns and interests should be developed as a partnership among equals. Further, as a partnership and collaboration, research processes must be transparent and must clearly specify all partners' responsibilities and obligations. Of course, the *Research Protocol* model may also offer the best assurance that all participants will benefit in one way or another from the research project.

Since ‘information is power’ or is at least empowering, the *Research Protocol* approach would make sure that all the information gathered is shared among the partners. It also offers the likelihood that issues of concern to all partners will be front and centre within the research. Signing on to a formally negotiated and framed agreement also provides participants with more than moral authority and moral persuasion respecting research processes and outcomes. The *Research Protocol* model can be developed so that it constitutes a contract in law that binds signatories to its specific terms and conditions.

### *Who Would Represent Fishermen?*

A wide range of research is being carried out among fishermen and fishing communities in Nova Scotia. These research projects deal with issues such as fisheries management, aquaculture development, the impacts of oil and gas development, as well as a range of other issues of interest to government agencies, private corporations, universities, and other organisations and individuals. In order to assure that these research projects are guided by a negotiated *Research Protocol*, fisheries representative organisations such as associations, cooperatives, and unions must assume leadership in defining the particulars of their protocols as well as in negotiating agreements. Certainly most making their living from fishing either belong or have access to a representative organisation that is equipped and prepared to work on their behalf.

The various kinds of fisheries-related research now being conducted in Nova Scotia have serious implications for fish harvesters and fishing communities. How will this information be gathered and what control will fish harvesters and their representative organisations have over how it is used? If harvesters’ ecological knowledge is systematically mapped and made public, for instance, who is to say whether this knowledge would either be used to improve fisheries policies, regulations and restore fisheries that have collapsed, or be used by oil and gas companies to promote their interests and needs.

Hopefully negotiated *Research Protocols* would offer at least minimum assurances for all participants that research processes will result in desirable outcomes and benefits. The strengths and sophistication of today’s fish harvester organisations and their memberships provide the means for research participants to be proactive in insisting that they share in and benefit from all research involving them. These qualities can assure that participants be empowered and capacitated through engagement with research.

*About SRSF . . .*



## Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries

**S**ocial Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) is a partnership linking university researchers and capacity with Mi'kmaq and inshore commercial fisheries community organizations. Although administered at St. Francis Xavier University, SRSF engages and represents a working collaboration between Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association, the Gulf Nova Scotia Bonafide Fishermen's Association, the Mi'kmaq Fish and Wildlife Commission, Afton Band and St.FX as well as other university-based social researchers. Additional fisheries and community organizations are linked with SRSF through relations with these core partners.

**S**RFSF is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through its Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) programme. The basic purposes of SRSF are: to develop fisheries-focused social research linkages between university researchers and community organizations, to build social research capacity, and to facilitate specific fisheries social research activities that will examine the concerns of the partnered community organizations. Social research capacity, experience and linkages are developed through research-focused workshops and specific research projects.

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**F**urther information about SRSF is available either through the project's web site ([www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf](http://www.stfx.ca/people/adavis/srsf)) or by contacting any of the SRSF project staff, either at St. FX or the offices of the partner organizations.