

The Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq and *Ka't* (American Eel): A Case Study of Cultural Relations, Meanings, and Prospects*

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c June 2003

*The research reported herein has been supported by a CURA grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (#833-99-1012). Lead authorship rotates with every article produced through our collaboration. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Ms. Erica Gillis (map production) and Ms. Krista MacEachern, SRSF Project Officer, to the development of this essay. We would also like to thank the three *CJNS* reviewers for their helpful comments. Please direct all correspondence respecting this article to Anthony Davis, St. FX Univ., P.O. Box 5000, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, B2G 2W5, adavis@stfx.ca

ABSTRACT

The Mi'kmaq have a deep and rich relationship with *Ka't* (American eel- *Anguilla rostrata*). While the Mi'kmaq continue to harvest *Ka't* for food, their relations with and use of eel also embody important cultural meanings and practices. *Ka't* occupies a notable place within many ceremonial settings, is used for medicinal purposes and, as a consequence of the ways in which *Ka't* is shared, is central to traditional relations of reciprocity. Over recent decades, however, the commercialisation of eel fishing in Atlantic Canada has led to a decline in their numbers and has contributed to a significant reduction in eel fishing and eel use among the Mi'kmaq. Loss of access to eel may well translate into a much broader process of cultural loss, as the ceremonial and sharing practices centred on the fishing and consumption of eel disappear. However, legal precedents affirming treaty

entitlements are positioning the Mi'kmaq to assume a more proactive role in managing both commercial and food fisheries. This paper reviews recent trends and discusses these issues with reference to the results of research carried out with Paq'tnekek (Afton), a Mi'kmaq community in northeastern Nova Scotia. The Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq relations with *Ka't* are described and discussed with respect to their cultural meanings and prospects. Implications for the revitalisation and empowerment of indigenous cultures are drawn from the lessons evident in this case study.

Key Words: Mi'kmaq, American eel, cultural relations, cultural meanings

Introduction

On August 13th, 1993, Donald Marshall Jr., a status Mi'kmaq of the Membertou Band, located on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and two other eel harvesters, one Mi'kmaq and one non-native fishing with Marshall, were charged by Fisheries and Oceans Canada officers with fishing eel (American eel – *Anguilla rostrata*) out of season, fishing with an illegal gear, and participating in commercial fishing without a license. They had been fishing eel in Pomquet Harbour, northeastern Nova Scotia, when apprehended and charged. They were fishing with the intention of selling their catches.

A little over six years later (September 19th, 1999), the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed all charges laid against Donald Marshall Jr., ruling that Marshall and all Mi'kmaq have a treaty right to participate in the harvesting of marine resources for commercial purposes, as long as commercial fishing is intended to provide a 'moderate livelihood'. The Mi'kmaq Nation greeted this judgement with a sense of joy and relief. After generations of exclusion and years of struggle, the Mi'kmaq's treaty-based rights assuring access to valuable fisheries economic resources had been affirmed. With the affirmation of this right, the Mi'kmaq Nation has achieved a critical step in positioning its people to generate and support resource-based employment and economic development (Davis and Jentoft 2001).

In all of the events that have followed the 1999 affirmation of treaty rights, it seems that very little, if any, attention and importance have been given the fact that Donald Marshall Jr. was fishing *eel* when charged (in the Mi'kmaq language eel is *Ka't* [phonetically – ka:taq]). The Supreme Court specifically cites the treaty provisions for Mi'kmaq trading and selling of eel as one of the key basis for its decision (Supreme Court of Canada, *R. v. Marshall* 1999(3): 3ff).^[1] Archaeological evidence demonstrates that the Mi'kmaq have been fishing eel, among other species, with harpoons, hooks, traps and weirs for thousands of years (Smith and Wintemberg 1973). The depth and meaning of this relationship is recognised widely within the Mi'kmaq community, especially among elders. It is also acknowledged in the historical records, noted in the treaties, and mentioned in government documents, as well as preserved in the memory of the elders.

Donald Marshall Jr.'s eel fishing experiences in Pomquet Harbour have been described as extremely successful:

“The catches were very good. The eels were extremely plentiful in the region and the catches the largest Mr. Marshall had seen in his career as a fisher. In one week the catch was well over one thousand pounds, the largest catch he had ever achieved. One other Mi'kmaq was fishing in the same area. He was also realizing good catches” (McMillan 1995:98).

Since the early 1990s eel has become generally much less plentiful throughout the Maritime Region, as well as in Pomquet and Antigonish Harbours and in the rivers and lakes that feed them (Paulette and Prosper 2002:4).^[2]

The decline of eel threatens the Mi'kmaq with loss of knowledge of eel behaviour and habitat, but also with loss of knowledge of the place of eel within Mi'kmaq cultural, social

and economic life. It is remarkable that the Mi'kmaq have been able to sustain their material and cultural relationship with *Ka't* given the hundreds of years of their experience within European-sourced hegemony. Maritime Canadians of European origin have until recent times been curiously disinterested in eel, leaving eel largely untargeted for intensive commercial exploitation.^[3] This circumstance likely has contributed to the Mi'kmaq's ability to sustain their material and cultural relations with *Ka't*. As a thoroughly marginalised people, most Mi'kmaq were left with access to land, coastline and resources only in settings where the dominant Europeans had little interest (Prins 1996, Upton 1979). This certainly was the case for *Ka't*, at least until recently.

As a result of these factors, it is critical to document as thoroughly as possible local relations with and knowledge of eel. This paper presents the preliminary results of the first stage of a research process dedicated to documenting thoroughly the Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq relations with and knowledge of *Ka't*. The focus here is on reviewing important patterns and findings evident from the results of a household-centred study conducted in the Paq'tnekek First Nation that was intended to document general attributes of past and current relations with eel. This study was also intended to solicit recommendations from the community respecting those persons considered especially knowledgeable about eel habitat, eel fishing, as well as its uses, preparation, and cooking.^[4] The depth and richness of Mi'kmaq relations with *Ka't* are such that documenting their many attributes will be important to the place that this relationship comes to occupy in the Mi'kmaq First Nation's exercise of self-governance, including management authority respecting key natural resources.

This paper provides a brief overview of key characteristics of the Mi'kmaq relationship with eel. Some archaeological and historical evidence concerning this relationship is presented. Also presented are some of the critically important cultural meanings that the Mi'kmaq associate with eel. This is followed by a description of the Paq'tnekek community and its formation as a 'reserve'. These qualities are important features of the social and cultural context within which the Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq have developed their relationship with eel. The results of the research are then presented, with an emphasis on profiling changes in the Paq'tnekek relation with *Ka't*.^[5] The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings with respect to concerns about Mi'kmaq culture and way of life as the First Nation exercises various treaty entitlements and moves towards self-governance rooted in material and cultural self-sufficiency.

Characteristics of Mi'kmaq Relations with *Ka't* (American Eel)

Ka't is one of nature's resources. The Mi'kmaq share a long cultural history with eel, as they do with many other marine life forms. Archaeological excavations of shell middens, for example, have demonstrated the rich and diverse resources used by the Mi'kmaq, as well as the variety of technologies employed (Smith and Wintemberg 1973). Eel was a traditional and important food source for many of the Mi'kmaq people throughout the year. Indeed, *Ka't* was among the peoples' favorite catches (Holmes-Whitehead 1991:9-10). The area surrounding the Paq'tnekek community, which is characterized by an abundance of riverine and estuarine habitat, has long been identified as an important harvesting ground for eel and other fish. Prior to and for many years after the establishment of the nearby town of Antigonish, the Mi'kmaq were known to camp in this area throughout the winter season (Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq et. al. 2001). For example, during 1799-1800, a petition was sent to Sir John Wentworth requesting assistance for the Mi'kmaq who were then experiencing a harsh winter. The fish and game were mentioned as being very scarce and "...the eels were hard to get at due to the thickness of the ice and uncommon depth of snow." The common belief at this time was that most of the Mi'kmaq would be winter camping in this area so that when relief was sent eight months later,

“No supplies were sent to Guysborough, Pictou, or Merigomish in the hopes that the Indians would winter in and around Antigonish” (Julien n.d.:5-6).

In addition to its importance as a food, *Ka't* is also considered to have many spiritual qualities as evident by its frequent appearance in legends and regular use as a ceremonial offering. One legend concerning ‘the Storm Maker’ (a mighty bird), tells of the plentiful supply of eels and other fish in the sea which were the main source of food for the Mi’kmaq people during the “hungry moons of winter”. This was the case until the arrival of the Storm Maker. The Storm Maker caused all the fish and eels to be swept out to sea by the wind created by the flapping of its wings. A Mi’kmaq tricked the Storm Maker and bound up its wings to prevent it from driving the fish and eels out to sea. But, a scum covered the water so that the people were unable to see the eels and fish. At this point, the Storm Maker’s wings were unbound by the Mi’kmaq after giving the promise not to cause such strong winds. The Storm Maker did create enough wind, though, to blow away the scum and allow the people to once again see the eels and fish (Robertson 1969:46-48). Here the importance of eel to the Mi’kmaq is emphasised, particularly as a critical food during the winter.

As a ceremonial offering, eel skins and heads were given to the ‘grandfathers’ (called feeding of Grandfather - *Apuknajit*) to give thanks to the spirits for allowing the people to survive through the most difficult time of year (Marshall 1997: 62). *Ka't* was also left as a gift for *Glooscap*, along with tobacco, by hunters. These gifts were offered to bring good fortune during the hunt (Joe 1988). The use of *Ka't* is also associated with taboos. The fact that a taboo exists clearly indicates *Ka't* possesses spiritual qualities and must be treated with respect. For instance, it was believed that... “If they had roasted an Eel, they also believed that this would prevent them from catching one [at] another time” (Denys 1908).

The Mi’kmaq people also used *Ka't* medicinally. For instance, eel skins (*kadaagel*) were used as braces and bandages, “...juniper balsam and eel skin make a good poultice for sprains (Lacey 1977: 39). The Mi’kmaq people were very resourceful and tended to use all portions of the eel. For example, the skins were also used as hair strings. In one legend, *Sakklo'pi'k*, the hair strings are described as made of “...painted eel skin, porcupine quills and sinews [which] are combined...into a new being – the hair ornament” (Holmes-Whitehead 1988: 11). Here eel skin in combination with other elements is attributed with transformative properties. Various other portions of eel were also used as bait for trapping.

The principles of sharing and reciprocity are of fundamental importance to Mi’kmaq culture and social relations, principles captured by the Mi’kmaq word *utkunajik*. Mi’kmaq as a rule do not hoard food, and usually when they have more than the family needs they share with others in the community (Leavitt 1995). With the Mi’kmaq, “The sun shares its warmth; the trees share their wind; and the Mi’kmaq share in the same spirit, be it in their material goods or in their life experiences” (Johnson *et al.* 1991:27). In another illustration of sharing Johnson’s essay mentions the process a Mi’kmaq person undergoes when travelling abroad to resettle. Within Mi’kmaq communities welcoming involves offering of a place to stay until the individual is able to obtain their own place. This is done in the spirit of sharing and not, for instance, as a method of repayment for favours owed. *Salite* is also mentioned as a method of sharing, and it still is practised. Sharing of *Ka't*, as one from among a variety of resources important for food, medicinal and ceremonial uses, has been a notable feature of Mi’kmaq life and relationships. This brief review highlights the deep and rich connection between the Mi’kmaq and *Ka't*. This relationship was and remains important to the Mi’kmaq culture and way of life.

The Paq'tnekek First Nation^[6], also known locally as Afton, is comprised mainly of a small community located approximately 24 kilometers east of Antigonish, in Northeastern Nova Scotia. As of July 2002, this First Nation consisted of 482 registered status Indians as defined by the Indian Act. Of these, 312 are living on reserve in 98 households. Of the remaining 170, 155 live off reserve and 15 live on another reserve.^[7] The resident population consists mainly of the band's registered members, but also includes band members from other reserves, non-status Indians, and a few non-natives.

Afton was registered as a reserve in 1820 with 1000 acres set aside for the Mi'kmaq Indians of the Afton and Pomquet areas (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC n.d.). The reserved land included 880 acres in the Pomquet area and 120 acres at the confluence of 'the river', i.e., Indian Gardens or the Pomquet River. This area was originally placed in trust for the benefit of the Indians to Rev. E. Burke. Although this area was not officially a reserve until 1820, it was referred to as a reserve in the early 1800s. It was created in a colonising environment in which the Mi'kmaq, whose population had been dramatically reduced by European diseases, were being overwhelmed and displaced by tens of thousands of immigrants. The early 'reserves' were created for the purpose of leaving the Mi'kmaq with places to live that would not interfere with settler prerogatives and interests. In Paq'tnekek, the original amount of reserve land, miserably limited in the first place, has been seriously reduced due to European encroachments. Today, the Paq'tnekek First Nation reserves consist of Pomquet and Afton No. 23 with 191.5 hectares, Summerside No. 38 with 43.4 hectares, and Franklin Manor No. 22 (part) with 212.5 hectares (INAC n.d.).^[8]

Paq'tnekek in Mi'kmaq means "by the bay." This meaning emphasises the importance of the bay and its resources to the Mi'kmaq people. The Antigonish and Pomquet harbours along with the associated watersheds and the land surrounding this area have been the source of many important foods for Mi'kmaq throughout the Maritime provinces. Before extensive contact with Europeans, the Mi'kmaq, an Algonquian-speaking people, were "...migratory hunters, fishers, and gatherers, [who] deftly exploited the ecological diversity of their territory..."(Prins 1996:27). They were organised into highly mobile bands composed of kin-related groups. Between spring and fall these bands assembled into larger communities at preferred coastal sites in order to access abundant marine resources and to engage in social and ceremonial life. They dispersed inland into small family-linked groups during the winter, engaging in hunting as well as ice-fishing for eel (Ibid: 27ff). The Mi'kmaq were careful to treat Mother Nature with respect for they wanted to ensure the bountiful resources for future generations. It is a common belief among the Mi'kmaq people that if nature was treated without respect, then there would be no resources left for future generations to draw upon.

Intensive European contact, beginning in the early 16th century, soon immersed the Mi'kmaq in trade relations and the commercialisation of land and marine resources. The 'customary' Mi'kmaq way of living and culture came under tremendous pressure and began a process of extensive change. The massive toll in Mi'kmaq lives and dramatic population decline fostered by European infections accelerated change. By the end of the 18th century, the Mi'kmaq had become thoroughly marginalised and effectively excluded from pursuing anything remotely resembling their customary way of life. Throughout this time treaty provisions were largely ignored as the Mi'kmaq slid into a state of abject destitution (Prins 1996).

Critical elements of the Mi'kmaq relation with *Ka't* and other fished resources are revealed in documents from this period. For instance, Abner Gerner, a Nova Scotia Indian Commissioner, reported that..."During my inquiries into the actual state of these people...whole families were subsisting on wild roots and eels..."(as quoted in Paul 2003:C2).

Another source noted that "...lobsters are found on all parts of the sea shore in great abundance and the catching of them is chiefly confined to the Indians, who carry them to market in their small canoes" (Hollingsworth 1787:63, as cited in DeWolf 1974:15). Both lobster and eel, during the 18th and 19th centuries, were of little commercial interest to European settlers and businesses, leaving the Mi'kmaq with relatively unfettered access. It is not coincidental that by the late 19th century few Mi'kmaq remained involved (more likely, were permitted to remain involved) with harvesting lobsters for market, once the high value commercial lobster fisheries were developing. While largely excluded from commercial lobster fishing, the Mi'kmaq continued as primary users of eel, for subsistence and other cultural uses. For many Mi'kmaq a critical quality of *Ka't* is that it was a 'last resort' quality food source that could be reliably accessed when falling on hard times and most other sources were unavailable. Certainly, eel remained an important source of quality food amidst the peoples' 19th century destitution.

Of course, the importance of Mi'kmaq relations with *Ka't* carries forward to the present day. This is especially true since *Ka't* remains a key resource within Mi'kmaq territory, treaty entitlements, and for Mi'kmaq communities. Further, relations with and use of *Ka't* will continue as important to the Mi'kmaq culture and way of life. The household-focused study reported on here is intended, in part, to deepen the understanding of the Paq'tnkek's use of and practices concerning *Ka't*.

A General Social Profile of Paq'tnkek Households

Three hundred and fifteen persons were specified as residing within the ninety-three out of 98 households that participated in the study, an average of 3.4 persons per household. The actual household sizes are distributed across a range that varies from nineteen containing a single resident to three housing ten persons. An almost equal number of males (49.8%) and females (50.2%) comprise the total household population.

The age structure of the total household population reveals important qualities of the 'on reserve' Paq'tnkek community. The average age of household residents is 25. But, this average does not reflect the predominance of children and adolescents in the population. The median age – which is 20 years – provides a better indication of the youthful character of the population (see Figure 1 in footnote #8).^[9]

Just over 67% of the population was born in Paq'tnkek or Antigonish.^[10] The remainder reported being born in other Nova Scotian settings (17.7%) or outside of Nova Scotia (14.5%). People born in Nova Scotian settings other than Paq'tnkek have been drawn from many places scattered throughout the province, with the largest portion of the birthplaces being located in northeastern Nova Scotia settings such as Eskasoni, Sydney, and Pictou Landing. With respect to those born outside of Nova Scotia, over one in every two originated in the United States, particularly from Boston and Maine.

Notably, age is strongly related with birthplace (see Table 1).^[11] Almost 85% of those 12 years of age and younger were born in Paq'tnkek, while almost one in every two of those born in 1969 or earlier (those 33 years of age or older) originated from another place in Nova Scotia (22.5%) or from outside of Nova Scotia (24.5%). Put another way, the younger a resident is, the more likely she or he was born in Paq'tnkek.

[Table 1 about here]

The pattern evident here suggests that considerable inter-regional and intra- provincial migration and shifting of residence had characterised the life of many among the older members of the 'on reserve' Paq'tnkek community. This pattern changes among the youngest. The vast majority of those younger than 33 have been born and raised in

Paq'tnekek. This is especially the case for the youngest third of the residents, those 12 years and younger. To a large extent, the shifting residence pattern of older community members is an outcome of a federal government "centralization" program introduced in 1942. The government attempted to relocate all Nova Scotian Mi'kmaq to one of two large communities, but the program failed and was abandoned by 1948. Many families did relocate, however, with some, but not all, moving back to either their home communities after 1948 or to yet another Mi'kmaq community as a result of marriage or other social relations that developed during that period (Union of Nova Scotia Indians Files, n.d.).

The processes by which social identity are constructed today at Paq'tnekek are thus complex and problematic, historically and culturally. Eel fishing, eel distribution among family and community members, and the use of eel for food as well as for other important purposes constitute a set of practices that have long been central to Mi'kmaq identity and culture. Exploring and understanding the current Mi'kmaq relationship with eel provides a means whereby a sense of community and social identity can be re-affirmed.

Summary of Research Results

Eighty people, 26.1% of the Paq'tnekek 'on reserve' community, report that they either currently fish or, in the past, have fished for *Ka't*. Of these, 53 are men (66.2%) and 27 are women (33.8%). While predominantly a male activity, this information shows the considerable involvement and experience that women have with eel fishing (see Table 2). Overall, this information shows that Paq'tnekek participation in eel fishing has declined notably over the last thirty years, and that women's involvement has declined much more dramatically than male participation. For example, just under 40% and almost 81% of the women and men, respectively, aged 42 and older report fishing or having fished for eel. By way of contrast, only 22.6% of the men and 15.2% of the women between 15 and 26 years of age report having ever fished eel.

[Table 2 about here]

These results are further reflected in the responses to the question: "When did you last fish for eel?". Almost 22% of the men, but not one woman, reported fishing for eel in the last year. In contrast, almost 78% of the women who reported fishing eel say that the last time was more than 10 years ago. This is the case for just over 35% of the men. Indeed, women's participation in eel fishing has declined so precipitously that any local custom of this within the community is at risk of being lost as eel fishing becomes recast as an almost exclusively male activity. [\[12\]](#)

As Figure 2 demonstrates, men are much more likely than women to fish eel during both the winter and summer seasons. Just over one in every two women fished eel only during the winter season, and just under 15% went eeling in both seasons. In contrast, 56% of the men report fishing in both seasons, with 22% noting participation in spring-summer and another 22% identifying fall-winter as the only time of year when they fish or fished.

[Figure 2 about here]

Several eel harvesters among those interviewed noted specific environmental conditions associated with spring-summer fishing. For example, one person remarked that there were "...lots of eels [during] full moon in June and July. On the lowest tide there were lots of eels." Another noted that with the full moon in June eels come near the shore. As a topic, winter fishing for eels attracted but a few initial comments, mostly regarding start-up following the formation of a more or less stable minimum thickness of ice.

To some extent, the seasons in which people fish eel reflect preferences for the qualities of the eel caught. Many have noted that winter caught eel are more sought after than summer eels. Winter eels are considered better for eating, with several describing summer eels as 'too strong'. For instance, one person stated that: "...winter eels taste

good, better than summer eels because the water is too warm in the summer.” Another noted that summer eels are so strong that elders with heart conditions should not eat them. While these sorts of distinctions are clearly drawn by experienced persons, a considerable number of younger persons stated that they really didn’t know the difference between winter and summer eels. This is likely a consequence of their more limited experience fishing eel and learning about eel from elders and experienced eelers.

In order to understand the importance attached to various uses of *Ka’t*, participants who reported fishing eel were asked: ‘What did you do with the eel you caught?’^[13] Figure 3 shows that most men and women noted that they fished eel for food. But, many more men than women (66.7% as compared with 14.8%) also specified that they gave away eel. This is a practice noted more commonly by older males. The practice of giving eel away is likely an expression of the ‘customary’ male role of contributing to the provision of food, especially meat and fish, within the natal and extended family, as well as within the broader community (Prins 1996). This sharing quality is similar for males whether or not they were born and raised in Antigonish-Paq’tnekek area, meaning that the practice of giving away eel was, and perhaps still is, a common behaviour on the part of men throughout the Mi’kmaq Nation. Similarly, it is also likely that male eel fishers are expected, when possible, to distribute eel at least within their extended families.

[Figure 3 about here]

A number of men (29.2%) and women (18.5%) also specified that they had sold at least some of the eels caught. Older eel harvesters in both gender groups are more likely to have sold eel than are those in the younger age groups. But, catching for the single purpose of selling seems rare, at least in the past. One elderly male eeler remarked that he occasionally bartered eel with non-natives for food and necessities. Several noted that only eels surplus to family and community needs would be sold. Often selling occurred simply because there was a need for cash, and eel was one of the few resources that Mi’kmaq could harvest and sell. But, fishing eel solely for the purpose of selling is reported to be considered an inappropriate and disapproved of activity, particularly among elders. As one person described: “We would fish ‘til we got a certain amount for family use. If a good spot was found, extra eels caught were given away to elders. Grandfather said never sell eels, give them away.” Finally, a notable number stated that at least some of the eel caught were used for ceremonial and medicinal purposes. Again, men and women in the oldest age categories are much more likely than younger persons to note ceremonial and medicinal uses. This indicates that important dimensions of ‘customary’ Mi’kmaq ceremonial and medicinal use of eel, as well the knowledge of these uses, are at risk of being lost within the next generation or so.

Social relationships reside at the heart of how people become involved in and learn about activities. This is particularly important with respect to the transmission of knowledge about food harvesting activities such as eel fishing. In order to explore this, questions were asked about who people first went fishing with as well as who taught them the most about eel fishing. They were also asked whether any other members of their family fished eel, and to indicate specifically the social relationship of each person to them.

To begin with, over 92% of the women and 75% of the men with eel fishing experience noted that they have other family members who fish or fished eel. A wide variety of kin were specified as fishing or having fished eel. Among the most prominent are fathers, fathers’ fathers, brothers, mothers brothers, sons, and husbands. Further, every Paq’tnekek born and raised woman reported having at least one other family member who fished or fishes eel. Over four in every five of the men born and raised in this locality also noted family connections. This attribute is only slightly greater for Paq’tnekek people than it is for those born and raised either outside of Nova Scotia or in some other region of Nova Scotia. This information portrays the fact that eel fishing is situated and, likely rooted, within birth and marriage family relationships and connections.

This key social quality is further underlined by responses to queries requesting that the participants identify the person or persons, by social relationship, with whom they

first went eel fishing as well as the person or persons who taught them the most about eel fishing (see Table 3). Certainly, the ‘facts’ of eel fishing as rooted in family relationships are made evident through these results. For instance, fully 96.3% of the women and almost two of every three of the men noted that they first went fishing with immediate family relations. In both instances, first fishing with fathers is the predominant family connection. But other important initial relationships are also evident for both men or women. For instance, over 11% of the men noted that they first fished eel with their mothers’ brothers. The unique qualities of this relationship, as the only maternally referenced kin connection specified, denotes it as a culturally signified special relationship among the Mi’kmaq, particularly but perhaps not exclusively between Sisters’ Sons and Mothers’ Brothers. The wife-husband relation is also notable in women’s descriptions of the person or persons with whom they first went fishing. Over one in five women specify that they first went eeling with their husbands. Among men, but not among women, social relations understood as friendships are specified frequently as important to first eel fishing experiences. Almost 30% of the male respondents, but only one female, noted that they first went fishing with a friend or friends.

[Table 3 about here]

When thinking about the person or persons from whom the most has been learned about eeling, both male and female respondents specify a pattern of social relations that is similar, but not identical to, the pattern evident for first fishing experience. That is, kin relations are identified as most important to learning about eel fishing by the majority of men and women, with fathers being specified commonly as most important to learning. But, it is interesting to note some of the differences between social relations associated with first eeling experiences and those linked with learning about eel fishing. Unlike women, there are a notable minority of men who report that they taught themselves. Also, a number of men note that their formative learning experiences were with brothers and other relatives. While numerous women report that their first eeling experiences were with husbands, apparently for most these experiences are not considered formative when it comes to learning about eel fishing. Women denote other kin as well as friends more commonly than husbands as important to learning.

With one notable exception, the patterns described above are similar among the women and men who fish or have fished eel irrespective of their age and the localities within which they were born and raised. The exception to this is the prevalence of mothers’ brothers as key in first fishing experiences and learning about eel fishing. This social relation is much more evident within the oldest age category than it is among all of the younger age categories. Keeping in mind that the actual numbers of cases are modest, this distribution suggests that sisters’ sons/daughters connections with mothers’ brothers as a culturally denoted special relationship may be fading in meaning and importance among younger Mi’kmaq and within Mi’kmaq families.

Eel Fishing Locations

Most of those interviewed reported that they eeled in many locations. Much of the Paq’tnkek residents’ eel fishing has been concentrated within northeastern Nova Scotia, and particularly around the Antigonish and Pomquet Harbour estuaries, as well as along the rivers that empty into them. But many Paq’tnkek residents have also fished for eel, at one time or another, in settings situated in every one of the Maritime Provinces as well as in the State of Maine. Almost 69% of all eeling locations mentioned are situated either around the Antigonish and Pomquet estuaries or along the rivers that feed into them. Among the most commonly noted sites (N = number of mentions) within this area are Williams Point (N=19), Summerside (N=28), Antigonish Harbour (N=16), Pomquet Harbour (N=14), South River (N=6), and Heatherton (N=7). In addition, people

noted that they fished for eel at Harbour Centre, Southside Harbour, Bayfield, and Barney's River. The next largest concentration (14.9%) of eeling sites mentioned are located on Cape Breton Island. On Cape Breton, Paq'tnkek residents report fishing eel in locations such as Eskasoni, the Bras D'or Lakes, Troy, and Nyanza. The remaining 15% or so of locations mentioned are spread all over mainland Nova Scotia (e.g., Pictou Landing, Guysborough, and the Stewiacke River), New Brunswick (e.g., Big Cove), Prince Edward Island (e.g., Summerside area), and even in Maine. Certainly, the eeling concentrated in and around the Antigonish and Pomquet estuaries is most meaningful for the majority of Paq'tnkek resident eelers as is indicated by the fact that the vast majority mention these sites first (see Map 1).

[Map 1 about here]

As might be expected, those born and raised in locations other than Paq'tnkek are slightly more likely to fish or have fished eel in two or more locations, and to have fished outside of the Paq'tnkek area. But, the eel fishers' gender and age appear much more indicative of whether they have fished for eel in a variety of locations. Just over 73% of the women reported that they fished in only one location, and for the vast majority that location is situated within the Paq'tnkek region. Only one woman indicated that she had fished eel in three or more sites. In contrast, almost 34% of the men specified three or more locations as sites where they fish or have fished eel. Again, most of these are locations situated around or associated with the Antigonish and Pomquet Harbour estuaries, although many have also fished for eel at one time or another in other Nova Scotian and Maritime locations. Among the Mi'kmaq, the Antigonish and Pomquet estuaries and watersheds were considered to be especially abundant with eel. Several of those interviewed mentioned that many from other communities in Cape Breton and throughout mainland Nova Scotia used to come to fish eel with the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq, particularly at places such as William's Point and Harbour Centre around Antigonish Harbour and at several locations in Pomquet Harbour.

When examined from the perspective of the eel fisher's age, the more aged the fisher the more likely she or he has fished in two or more locations. For instance, in the age group 33 and older almost 65% report fishing in two locations. Further, just over 35% in this age group specify fishing in three or more locations. In contrast, almost 73% of the 13 to 32 age group report fishing for eel in only one location. This distribution suggests that Paq'tnkek resident eel fishing, over recent years, has become concentrated in fewer and fewer sites than was once the case. The reported experiences of the older age group show that it was once common for eel fishing to be distributed across a wide variety of locations, particularly within the Paq'tnkek region. The changes noted may reflect little more than a response to the decline in eel populations, with a consequence of concentrating eel in known preferred habitats. Additionally, this pattern may reflect a change in Paq'tnkek resident harvesting practices and relations with eel, especially with younger persons participating less frequently in the eel fishery and concentrating their fishing in a far narrower range of sites than was once the case.

Uses of American Eel

It has already been noted that, while eel is fished primarily for food, it is consumed in a variety of settings as well as used for a variety of purposes. In general, just over 54% of all household members surveyed (169 of 312 persons) reported having eaten eel. Percentages for males (56.1%) and females (52.2%) were roughly the same. Of course, the numbers of those reporting having eaten eel, contrasted with the much smaller number specified as having fished eel, demonstrates that eel has been distributed widely by those who catch it. These patterns apply across the community irrespective of whether the participants in this study were born and raised in the Paq'tnkek locality or elsewhere.

A different and important pattern emerges when examining eel consumption with respect to the age of participating household members (see Figure 4). The vast majority of men and women 27 years of age and older report having eaten eel. While substantial numbers in the 14 to 26 years of age range also are identified as having eaten eel, the

information presented in Figure 4 shows a remarkable decline through this age range when compared with the eel consumption experiences of those falling in the older age categories. Given that a small portion of those falling into the youngest age category are reported as eating eel, it is unlikely that the decline in eel consumption for the 14 to 26 year age group can be attributed mainly to factors such as Mi'kmaq cultural prohibitions or restraints on feeding eel to children, adolescents and young adults. It is more likely that factors such as decline in access to eel as well as changes in food preferences are at work among the constant and dramatic decline in the experiences of the youngest age groups with eating eel. What was once a commonly shared and experienced food is becoming an increasingly rare experience.

[Figure 4 about here]

This is made even more evident by the responses to the question: "When Have You Eaten Eel [Last]?". Twenty percent of the men and almost 25% of the women reported last eating eel more than 10 years ago, with only 31% of the men and 25% of the women reported eating eel within the last year. But, within this latter group those 42 years of age and older report eating eel much more commonly than is the case for any other age group ^[14]. These differences suggest that both access and preference are involved, with older persons expressing a preference that has its roots in a time when eel was consumed by the vast majority of Mi'kmaq.

Figure 5 profiles female and male preferences respecting the season during which eel is caught for food. While many men and women do not express a preference for eel on the basis of season in which it is caught, a notable number do express a preference for only winter-caught eel. Very few state a preference for only summer caught eels. Women express a particular preference for winter caught eels, while men are slightly less discriminating. Summer-caught eels are said by many to be 'too strong'. A few persons even noted during the interviews that the strength of summer eels was such that the elderly, particularly those with heart conditions, should be discouraged from eating them.

[Figure 5 about here]

Those who eat or haven't eaten eel report that they obtain eel from a variety of sources (see Figure 6). One of the most interesting attributes of the patterns evident here is simply that most receive eel from family members and friends. Those who fish are shown to supply eel to both their immediate families as well as to the families of other kin and friends within the Paq'tnekek community, and no doubt elsewhere. The patterns evident here reflect and emphasise the continuing practice among the Mi'kmaq of redistributing and sharing resources, where and when possible. Of course, this quality of family, kin, friendship, and community relationships represents an important social foundation from which to assure wide distribution of benefits arising from resource entitlements, such as those assured by the Marshall decision. But, a shadow of sorts may be falling over this customary Mi'kmaq cultural practice. As noted earlier, younger aged eel harvesters are much less likely than older eelers to give away portions of their catches. Hopefully, this is only a temporary consequence of the dramatic declines in eel resource and catches. Once eel return in sufficient numbers, the sharing and redistribution practices may well flower fully once again, given the predominance and embeddedness of the 'sharing value' within Mi'kmaq culture, social life and social relationships.

[Figure 6 about here]

As might be expected, the predominant use of eel among the Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq is for food. This holds true across all age groups, and does not vary meaningfully with respect either to gender or to the locality within which persons are born and raised; but, there are other attributes respecting the use of eel. First of all, many people report that they gave away eel which they had, in the first instance, been given. Surely this is another instance of the sharing and redistributive cultural ethic. Again, this behaviour is reported much more commonly among the older persons who eat or have eaten eel than it is among the younger age groups.

Another quality evident is the use of eel in ceremonial settings. Of particular importance here is the place of eel among ‘traditional foods’ offered during Mi’kmaq and Paq’tnekek feasts as well as during the meals and community gathering associated with funerals. Notably, many also reported that they use or have used eel for medicinal purposes. This is yet another attribute that is much more commonly associated with older household members than it is with many falling into the younger age groups. Several noted that eel oil is good for ear infections. One person specified that: “...the eel is hung for three days to drain the oil.” Eel oil was also mentioned as effective for chest colds and congestion. The treatment here is to rub the oil directly on to the chest. Another specified that the broth from eel stew is an effective treatment for the flu. Eel skins were also mentioned as effective as wraps for sprained ankles and wrists, and, when soaked in eel oil, as a treatment for painful legs and arthritis. Given that this sort of knowledge is almost exclusively associated with elders, there is a risk that knowledge about these uses of eel may be lost over the next generation, particularly since few among the younger adults seem aware of the ways in which eel has been used medicinally. Since this knowledge does not vary significantly on the basis of gender or place of origin, it is likely present throughout the Mi’kmaq Nation as a core feature of Mi’kmaq culture and social life.

Explanations for the Decline of Eel Fishing

The steady decline of eel fishing at Paq’tnekek over the past several decades has been brought about by a number of cultural and environmental factors. Ease of physical access, first of all, has been restricted, not just in recent decades but ever since the creation of the reserve system. Many of the lands once plentiful with game and fish were occupied and cleared by newcomers, thus reducing or eliminating access to critical fishing grounds. For instance, Indian Gardens (Summerside) once served as a vital site in Mi’kmaq food harvesting. Through relocation of the people from this area to the main reserve, the Mi’kmaq could no longer easily access the harbour or river. Further, the Antigonish Harbour area was once of such great importance to the Mi’kmaq people that winter camps were set up there in order to access marine life. Consolidation of people on the reserves, combined with the creation and enforcement of private property rights as land was allocated to settlers, has placed physical and legal restrictions on the Mi’kmaq’s ability to sustain participation in the eel and other fisheries. The cultural meaning of eel fishing for the Mi’kmaq, as well as the place of eel in the Mi’kmaq diet, have been compromised considerably by these developments.

Problems associated with physical access have also occurred more recently. As one eel fish harvester noted in regard to changes occurring within the last few decades:

At one time, people who owned fishing scows (flat bottom boats made of boards) would leave their boats on shore, often along with other tools such as fishing spears, oars, eel spears, etc. It was no problem for other individuals to come along and use the boat to get a feed of eels. Whoever went fishing eels or other types of fishing often shared their catch with the family who owned the boat. Yet, as time went by this practice seemed to cease when respect for another one’s gear began to diminish. This made people less likely to leave their boats for other people to use and share. Therefore, accessibility to a boat and other tools was reduced. As a result, fishing practices within the community have declined (Prosper 2002).

A tendency towards less respect for other peoples’ property and towards increased vandalism have occurred within both the Paq’tnekek and surrounding non-Mi’kmaq communities in recent times. These changes have further eroded the Mi’kmaq peoples’ relations with and use of *Ka’t*.

Secondly, the cumulative environmental impacts that have occurred over the past several decades, and further back in time, have also led to a reduction of the eel population within the Antigonish and Pomquet estuaries and their watersheds. Environmental impacts may include the chemical contamination of the inland water habitat and oceanic waters, sarguusum seaweed harvesting, introduction of foreign species, loss of habitat due to deforestation, agricultural practices, and obstructions of waterways from dams and

causeways, restocking practices of rivers and lakes with fish species that are valued by recreational fishers, introducing recreational fishery species as competitors with eel for food within the ecosystem, technological advancements in fishing power and efficiencies, and the decline of eel grass. Exact knowledge of cause-effect relationships and dynamics requires specific studies that have yet to be completed. Irrespective, there is no question that the access to and use of eel among the Mi'kmaq people has been impacted upon negatively.

Thirdly, the most recent and fairly abrupt decline in the local eel population appears to be directly linked to the commercialisation of eel fishing, particularly with regard to the eel spear fishery. During the 1990s the Nova Scotia eel spear fishery reached an all time peak in catches (Paulette and Prosper 2002). Yet, at the same time, the commercial eel spear fisheries in other Maritime provinces were declining. But, the price for eel continued to rise. As a result, eel fishers from other Maritime Provinces were drawn to the Nova Scotia grounds in order to participate in the lucrative fishery. The eel spear fishery in Nova Scotia was at its peak with prices continuing to rise over the next four years, reaching their highest point in 1997. Eel catches and prices collapsed in late 1998 and early 1999 (Paulette and Prosper 2002).

These conditions left the Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq and surrounding communities with limited access to eel for food. Meetings between the Acadian and Paq'tnekek communities were held with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to stress the importance of the eel food fishery. As a result, a specific location in the Pomquet Harbour area in the Summerside area was reserved specifically for the eel food fishery. Additionally, all parties agreed that only lanterns, and no generators, would be used during night fishing. Commercial fishing, in effect, was banned from the area. But, the damage to eel populations was already done. These developments have likely accelerated the changes underway within the Mi'kmaq respecting the selling, use and sharing of eels.

Conclusions

For the Mi'kmaq people, the Paq'tnekek region has been an important site, over a period of many centuries, for sustained and intensive participation in eel fishing. The research shows that there is a deep cultural and material connection between the Mi'kmaq and *Ka't*. This connection extends from harvesting *Ka't*, mainly for food, through extensive sharing of eel within and among the community's families, to the use of *Ka't* for ceremonial and medicinal purposes.

But, the research results also show that the Mi'kmaq connections with *Ka't* are in jeopardy. This is evident in the dramatic decline of participation in eel fishing and use among all of the younger age groups; but, most notably among women and adolescents. Certainly the evidence suggests that there are conditions developing with the potential to interrupt the transmission of knowledge and practices from the older to the younger generations. In particular, special knowledge and practices arising from the relations of Mi'kmaq women with *Ka't* fishing, preparation, cooking, and medicinal and ceremonial usages are especially at risk.

In addition to the several factors noted previously as responsible for the decline in eel fishing, it should also be noted that all manner of traditional Mi'kmaq practices are in decline as a consequence of the many government-imposed institutional practices and social policies that continue to frame and contain Mi'kmaq lives. Loss of mobility, for example, has been brought about not just by the settlement of the area by Europeans, but also as an outcome of programs implemented by Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for the purpose of controlling those who live on reserves. That is, full access to all entitlements requires a registered band member to live on a reserve.

Social programs only assist those living on reserve, and priority for access to employment opportunities, educational services, and housing is given to those living on reserve.

These policies of consolidation and control place limits on the capacity of Mi'kmaq individuals and families to reside in various settings. This, in turn, creates barriers to experiences with and knowledge about cultural practices such as fishing and sharing eel, as well as the ceremonial and medicinal use of *Ka't*.

The results concerning the relationship of age and gender with fishing eel shows a particularly dramatic decline in harvesting experiences among younger persons and women. Such a decline in participation rates and experiences shows that fewer persons are accessing and using Mi'kmaq knowledge respecting eel harvesting. Another example of changed cultural practices and potential cultural loss is evident in information respecting the sharing of eel. Many more people report eating eel than report fishing eel. This reveals that eel has been extensively redistributed and shared by those fishing it within and between families. The evidence reported here also shows that younger adults are much less likely to have eaten eel than older persons. Further, when eating eel, younger persons are much more likely to have eaten it in their parents and grandparents homes rather than in their own homes. Additionally, in recent times eating eel for many people is an experience almost exclusively associated with feasts, funerals and other ceremonial occasions. Certainly these trends suggest that eel is no longer as commonly shared within and between families as it once was, particularly as a distinctive quality of the Mi'kmaq diet. Should these trends continue, there is a very real risk that much, if not all of this knowledge, will disappear.

The changes underway are such that it is now critical to document thoroughly Mi'kmaq knowledge of *Ka't*, as well as Mi'kmaq practices associated with harvesting, preparing, cooking and using eel for ceremonial and medicinal purposes. This will be the purpose of the second phase of the current study during which the members of the Paq'tnkek Mikmaq community identified as knowing a lot about catching, preparing and using eel will be interviewed. This work will help preserve the cultural connection between the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq and *Ka't*. It will also systematically and thoroughly document the connection of the Mi'kmaq with eel in a manner that will assist in and be of use to the peoples' entitlements, governance and management of resources such as eel. Finally, it is important to document elders' knowledge and experiences so that future generations can readily access it as part of the work necessary to keep Mi'kmaq culture vibrant. This research will also better position the people to prepare for a future in which there will be more opportunity to affect and to direct change, as well to engage in self-governance of critical resources such as *Ka't*.

Map 1: Numbers of Times Specific Eel Fishing Places Were Mentioned

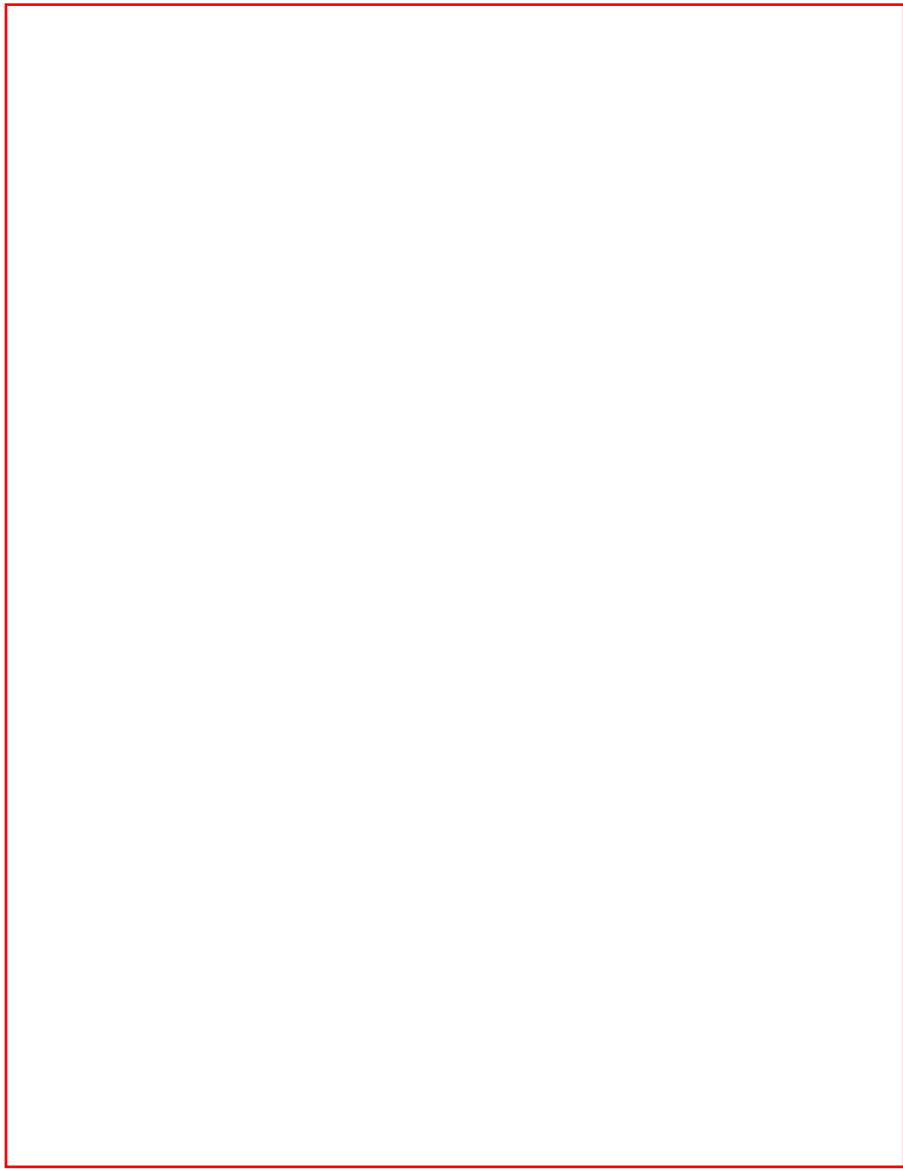


Table1: Place Born Categories by Age Categories

<i>Place Born</i>	<i>Age Categories</i>		
	33 and Older (N=102)	Between 13 and 32 (N=103)	12 and Younger (N=106)

	%	%	%
Paq'tnkek (and local region)	52.9	65.0	84.9
Other Places in Nova Scotia	22.5	20.4	10.4
Places Located Outside of Nova Scotia	24.5	14.6	4.7

Note: Chi square test = <0.001.

Table 2: Past and Current Participation in Eel Fishing by Age and Gender

<i>Age Categories</i>	<i>Gender</i>	
	Male % (N)	Female % (N)
42 Years to Oldest	80.6 (31)	39.3 (28)
27 to 41 Years	55.2 (29)	32.4 (34)
15 to 26 Years	22.6 (31)	15.2 (33)
8 to 14 Years	9.7 (31)	0.0 (29)
Youngest to 7 Years	0.0 (28)	0.0 (28)

Table 3: Important Eel Fishing Social Relationships by Gender

<i>Social Relationship</i>	<i>Eel Fishing Experiences</i>			
	<i>First Fished Eel With</i>		<i>Taught Most About Eeling</i>	
	Male (N=44) %	Female (N=27) %	Male (N=42) %	Female (N=26) %
Fathers	43.2	55.6	38.1	61.5
Mothers	0.0	7.4	0.0	3.8
Fathers' Fathers	4.5	7.4	4.8	3.8
Mothers' Brothers	11.4	3.7	9.5	0.0
Husbands	0.0	22.2	0.0	7.7
Other Relatives	6.8	0.0	16.7	11.5
Friends	29.5	3.7	16.7	11.3
Self	4.5	0.0	14.3	0.0







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Endnotes

[1] Visit www.lexum.umontreal.ca/csc-scc/en/index.html in order to examine the complete text of the Court's Marshall decision.

[2] The dramatic decline in the availability of eel, particularly within the Antigonish and Pomquet Harbours and related watersheds, led the Paq'tnekek Fish and Wildlife Society, in collaboration with Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries, based at St. Francis Xavier University (www.stfx.ca/research/srsf) to develop a two stage research project that is intended to document past and present Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq relationships with and use of eel (*Ka'it*). The first stage of the research has been focused on thoroughly documenting eel fishing and use within Paq'tnekek households. The next stage will involve working closely with persons identified by the community through the household survey as knowing a lot about fishing, preparing and cooking eel.

[3] Highland and Island Scotland was the main source of the late 18th and early 19th century immigrants who settled Nova Scotia's Gulf of St. Lawrence region, so much so that these people have come to define the region's ethnicity. Nonetheless, substantial French Acadian populations concentrated within regional pockets considerably pre-date the coming of the Scots. The Acadians had developed a close social and economic relation with the Mi'kmaq, by that time, had been largely Catholicised. The Acadian and Mi'kmaq communities, to this day, harvest eels. Few among the dominant Scots and English appear to have ever participated in this fishery. This is not surprising given that "...there is no record of eel fisheries, old or new, in the Highlands and that eels have never formed an article of food there" (Grant 1961:268).

[4] Before proceeding with this study, the Paq'tnekek Fish and Wildlife Society developed a research proposal outlining the study's general features and purposes. This proposal was submitted to the Mi'kmaq Research Ethics Board for review, advice and approval. Once the advice and approval were received, the Paq'tnekek Fish and Wildlife Society and Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries proceeded to design the study, as well as to develop the household questionnaire. The study was conducted between May 15th and July 8th, 2002. All of the interviews were conducted by two interviewers and took place within the participants' households. On many occasions and as anticipated in the research design, two or more household members participated in the interviews. Ninety-three of the ninety-eight 'on reserve' Paq'tnekek community households participated in the study, representing a 95% participation rate. This is an outstanding result, indicating the interest of the community in the study as well as reflecting the diligence of the interviewers in their pursuit and conduct of the interviews. Rare is the study that attains such a high level of participation.

[5] The first phase of the research was designed with a focus on thoroughly documenting basic attributes of household-centred experiences in the Paq'tnekek First Nation with fishing, preparing and cooking eel. Additionally, this phase was intended to solicit recommendations from the people of Paq'tnekek respecting the persons thought of as knowing a lot about catching, preparing and cooking eel. In order to accomplish these objectives, a questionnaire loosely modelled on a household-centred, census approach to gathering information was developed. This approach was adopted after deciding that survey techniques employing either telephone or self-report methods would likely be unsuccessful in realising the level of participation desired and needed. The survey instrument and consent form were designed during a series of workshops. The Paq'tnekek Fish and Wildlife Society staff composed a letter introducing the Society and the study to the Paq'tnekek community. The letter was then hand-delivered to every household, as well as to the Chief and Band Council. Two additional Mi'kmaq interviewers were contracted to assist in the completion of the study. Both of these interviewers were selected, in part, because they spoke the Mi'kmaq language and had previous interviewing experiences. All record-keeping matters such as tracking completion rates and assuring completion and storage of consent forms and questionnaires was managed by PFWS staff. Any

extra information recorded by the interviewers on the questionnaire forms was identified by household number and recorded in a separate data file. All of the attributes concerning matters such as assuring confidentiality, management of records, storage of forms, and sharing of information conform with the research ethics provisions specified by the Mi'kmaq Research Ethics Committee in their approval of the study. The interview instrument and initial report associated with this research is available at www.stfx.ca/research/srsf.

[6] *Paq'tnkek* is the Mi'kmaq word for the area wherein the Afton reserve is located. Renaming their community the Paq'tnkek First Nation is one step toward acknowledging and reclaiming the peoples' history and cultural relations within this area.

[7] These statistics are provided by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website under their First Nations communities profiles (<http://esd.inac.gc.ca/fnprofiles>).

[8] Franklin Manor is currently co-owned with the Pictou Landing First Nation with distribution is based on population. Presently, Afton owns approximately 48% of this land which is located 32 km SE of Amherst, Nova Scotia.

[9] The youthful profile of the 'on reserve' population is illustrated in Figure 1. Fully 30% of the residents are 11 years of age or younger, while most of the

[Figure 1 about here]

middle-aged and all of the seniors fall within the oldest 10% of the population, i.e., those who are 51 years of age and older. It is important to note that this population growth trend is entirely consistent with patterns in other First Nations, and is opposite to the 'ageing' trend in Canada's non-native population. Finally, the depth and pervasiveness of the youthful age profile reveals that this characteristic of the Paq'tnkek and other First Nations populations will persist into the foreseeable future. The population dynamics indicate that the Paq'tnkek community will soon be facing serious challenges when it comes to meeting their needs in the areas of education, health care, housing, social programs, economic development and employment. It is highly unlikely that these problems will be solved or alleviated by out-migration since the current trend is for people to stay in the community rather than move elsewhere in order to obtain better services or better employment. Currently only those with professional skills are likely to move away from the community in order to find work. Should the community fail to meet the challenges posed by a rapidly increasing population they are likely to see a worsening of social conditions within the community, reduced opportunities for young people to learn traditional skills and less interest by young people in carrying on traditional Mi'kmaq practices. It will not be just the Mi'kmaq connection to *Ka't* that will be lost, but a whole range of cultural practices related to the physical environment and to traditions of sharing the resources of that environment. The youthfulness of the community also creates certain opportunities for positive change, however. If the majority of young people living in the community were to acquire a serious interest in customary cultural knowledge, they would, through numbers alone, become a powerful force towards the strengthening and maintenance of customary knowledge and practices, which could include a revival of Mi'kmaq language use as well as other forms of knowledge such as those associated with *Ka't*. The community thus stands at a crossroads. On the one hand there exists a very real possibility of an accelerating loss of customary knowledge and values, but on the other the possibility of cultural revitalisation. A deeper understanding of Mi'kmaq relations with *Ka't* will assist the goal of revitalisation through developing greater awareness within the community of a process of cultural loss that is underway; but, which is not irreversible.

[10] A significant number of Paq'tnkek residents report being born at the hospital in Antigonish but for the most part their families were living in Paq'tnkek. Very few Mi'kmaq families live permanently in Antigonish.

[11] The age categories employed here were chosen because they constitute comparable thirds of the population.

[12] The interviewers asked about the gears used to fish eel. Almost 95% of those experienced in fishing noted that they used spears of various sorts. Some specified that, during the winter fishery, metal spears were used, while, during the summer, preference was for wooden spears, often home-made. Almost 16% mentioned that they had used nets on occasion, while much smaller numbers of participants in this study noted that they had used hooked lines, pots and polls. Certainly, the spear has remained the fishing gear of choice, reflecting a Mi'kmaq cultural practice which goes back into the mists of time. This is supported by the archaeological evidence noting common finds of harpoon and fish spear technologies in shell middens throughout Nova Scotia, but especially in the Northeast region along the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Northumberland Strait shores.

[13] Many of those responding to this question indicated that they used eels in two or more ways. For instance, several replied that on different occasions and times they sold, ate, and gave away eels.

[14] That is, a little over 46% of those 42 years of age and older indicate that they ate eel in the last year, as contrasted with 18% of those in all other age categories combined.