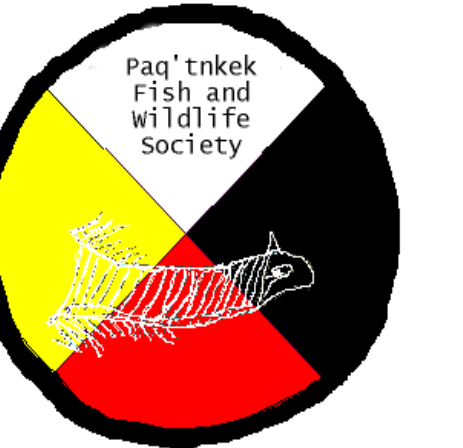




# Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq and *Kat* (American Eel): Designing and Conducting Results-Rich Traditional Ecological Knowledge Social Research

Poster Created By: Anthony Davis, Kerry Prosper, Mary Jane Paulette, Holli MacPherson, and John Wagner



## What is SRSF?

Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) is a partnership linking university researchers with Mi'kmaq and small boat commercial fisheries community organisations. The SRSF project is administered at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia and operates on the ground, in northern Nova Scotia, through a working collaboration between:

- Gulf Nova Scotia Bonafide Fishermen's Association (Antigonish)
- Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (Canso)
- Paq'tnkek Fish and Wildlife Society, Paq'tnkek First Nation (Afton)

Additional fisheries, community organisations and university-based researchers are linked with SRSF through relations with these core partners ([www.stfx.ca/research/srsf/2001.htm](http://www.stfx.ca/research/srsf/2001.htm)).

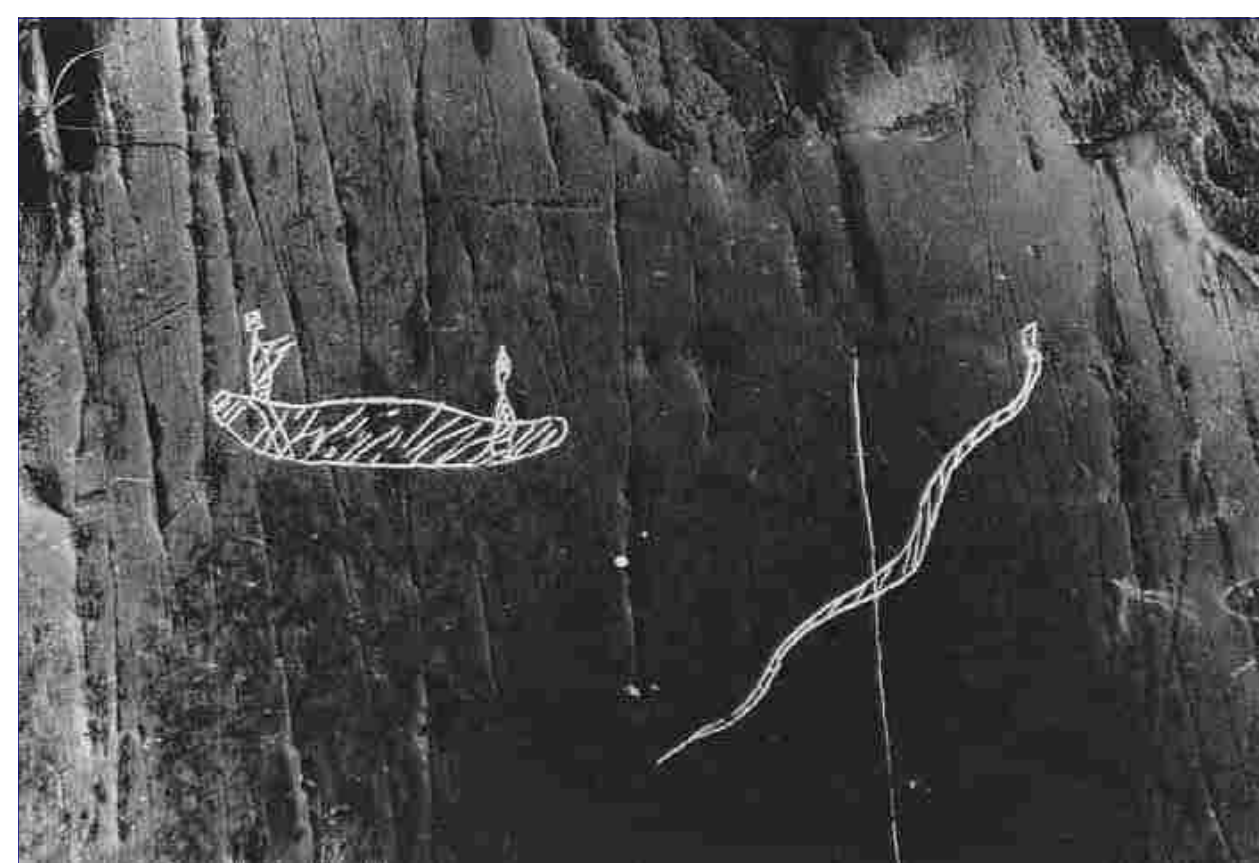
## Paq'tnkek Fish and Wildlife Society (PFWS) / Paq'tnkek First Nation

Kerry Prosper: Community Research Coordinator  
Mary Jane Paulette: Researcher

PFWS's research focus is to rediscover and document the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and *Kat* (American Eel), an important part of Mi'kmaq culture. PFWS's primary research documents local traditional ecological knowledge for the purposes of building community-level resource management and research capacity.

PFWS's Background research is ongoing and focused on the following key areas:

- Mi'kmaq language as it relates to *Kat* and resource management
- Mi'kmaq legends and stories involving *Kat*
- Traditional Mi'kmaq resource governance
- Environmental and cultural knowledge of the local area
- Land use changes within local watersheds
- Scientific, environmental and ecological data pertaining to *Kat*
- Commercial eel fishery data and fisheries management

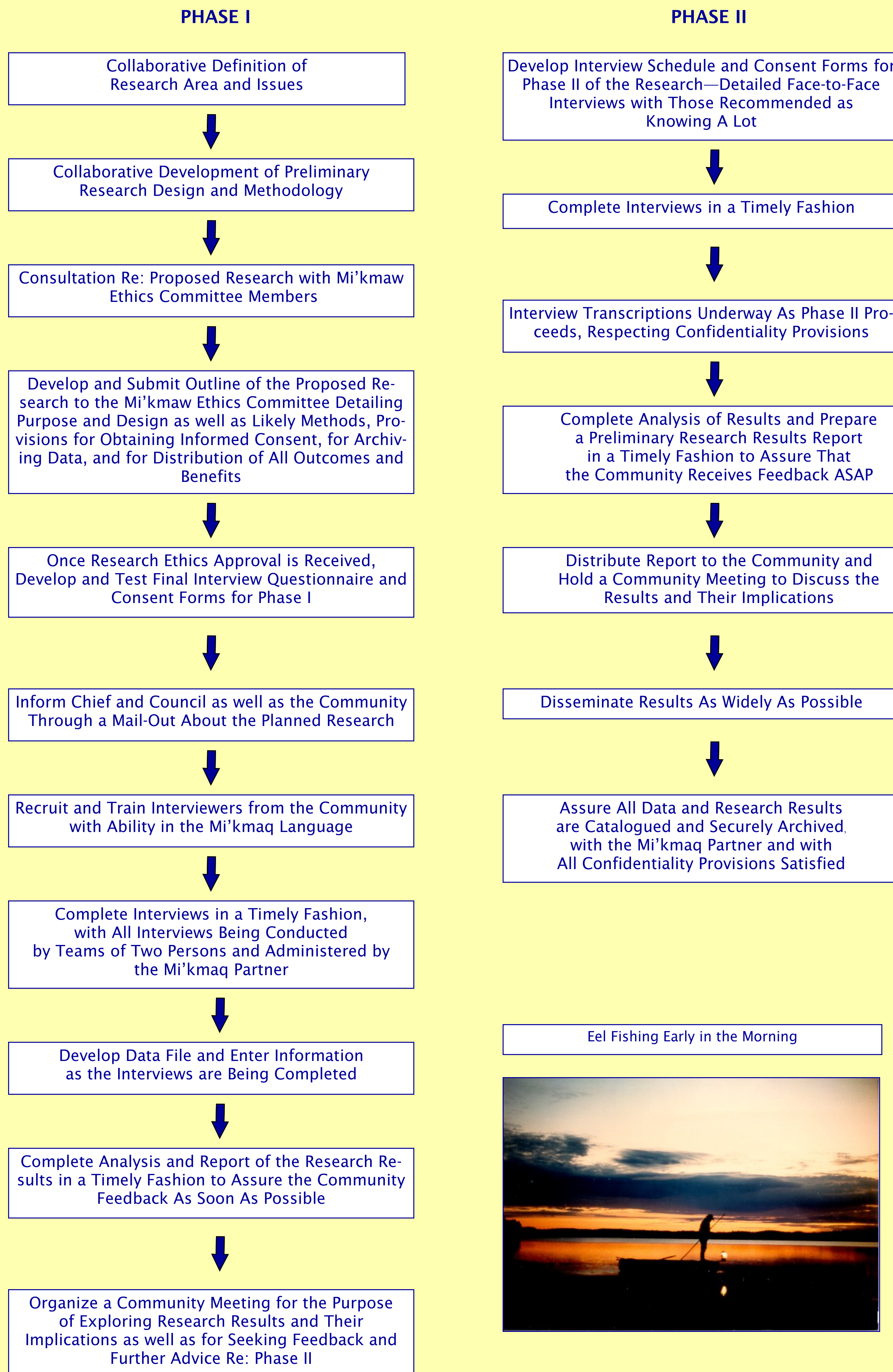


Mi'kmaq man and woman in a canoe; serpent, Fairy Bay, Kejimikujik National Park, NS  
Olive and Arthur Kelsall, 1946–1955  
Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax NS

Petroglyphs in Nova Scotia that are thousands of years old, illustrate the traditional Mi'kmaq worldview in which humanity exists as a harmonious part of nature. The horned serpent, *jipijika'maq*, is spoken of in many legends as a great force in the worlds of both land and water. The serpent's actions described in the legends are similar to those of the eel.

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## A Two Phase Research Process



## Eel Fishing Early in the Morning



## Selected Research Results – Phase I (93 of 98 Paq'tnkek households participated in this study)

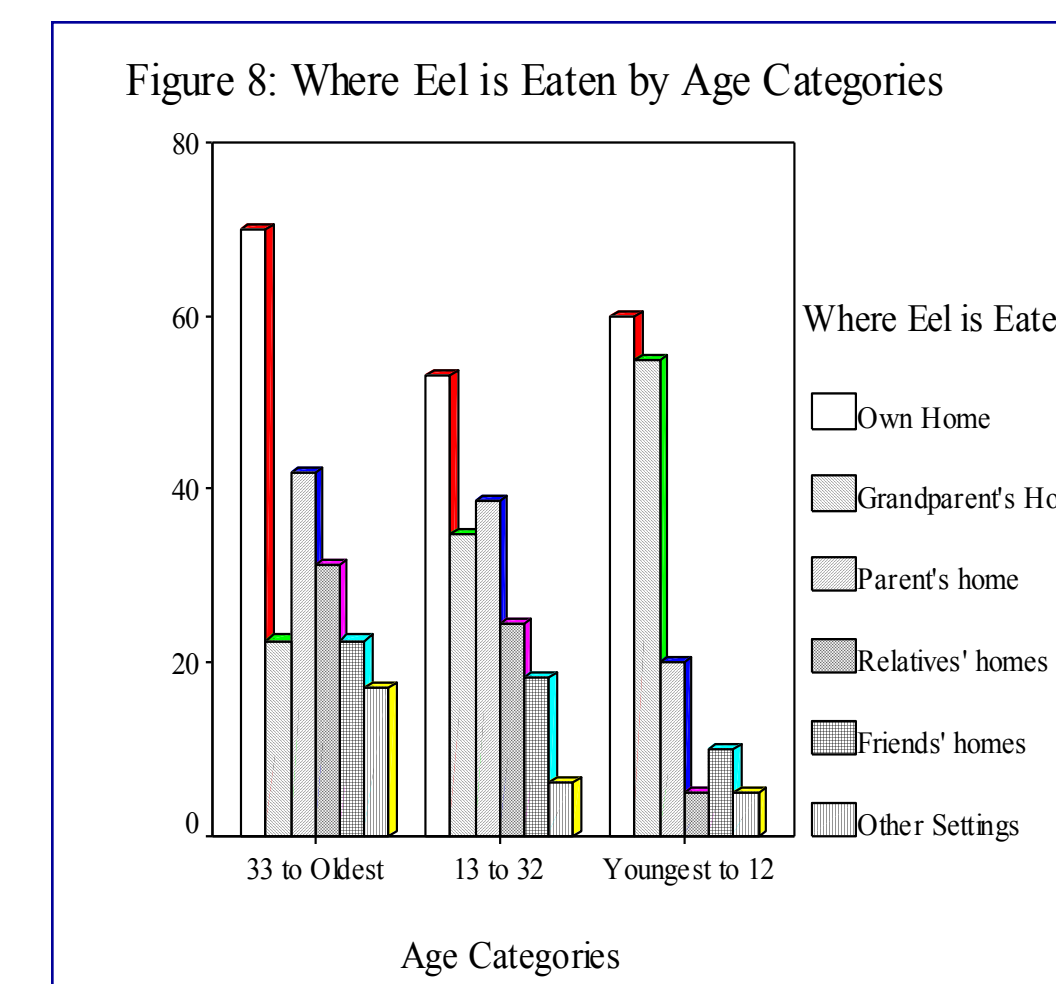
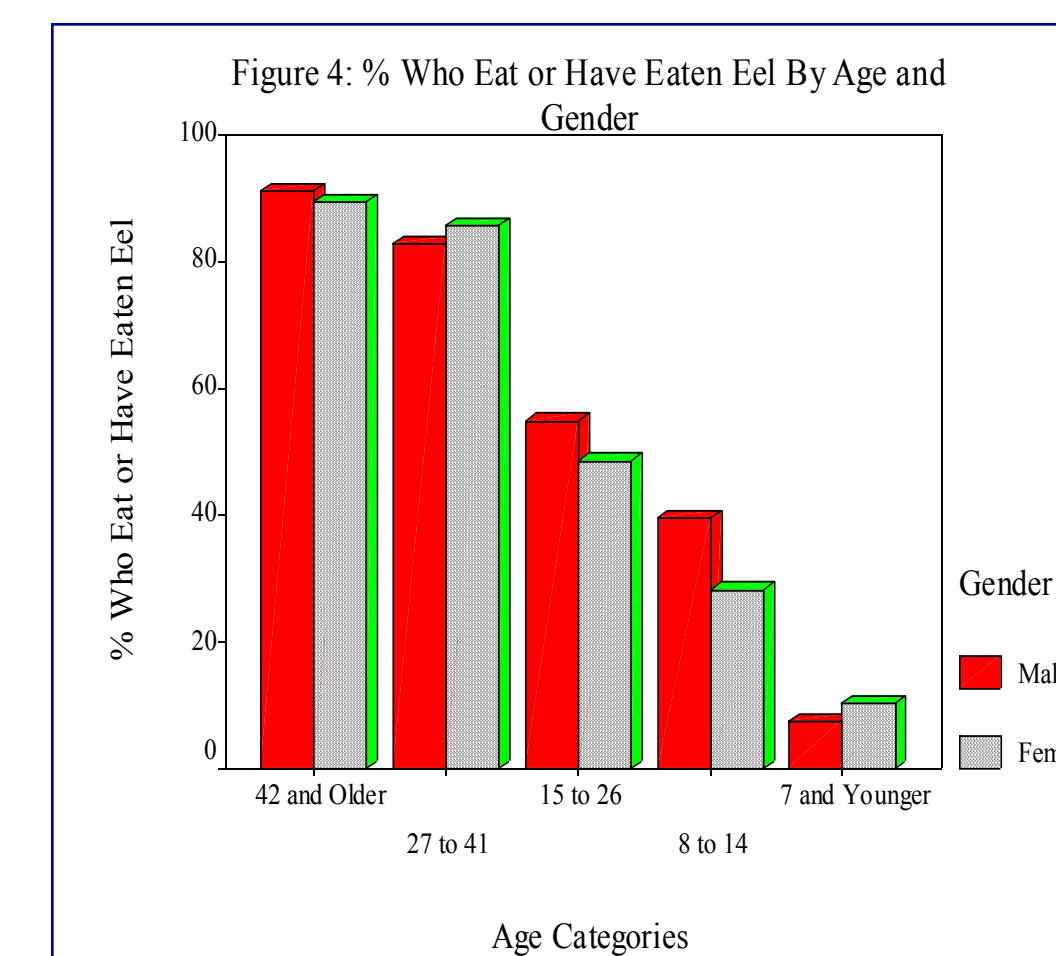
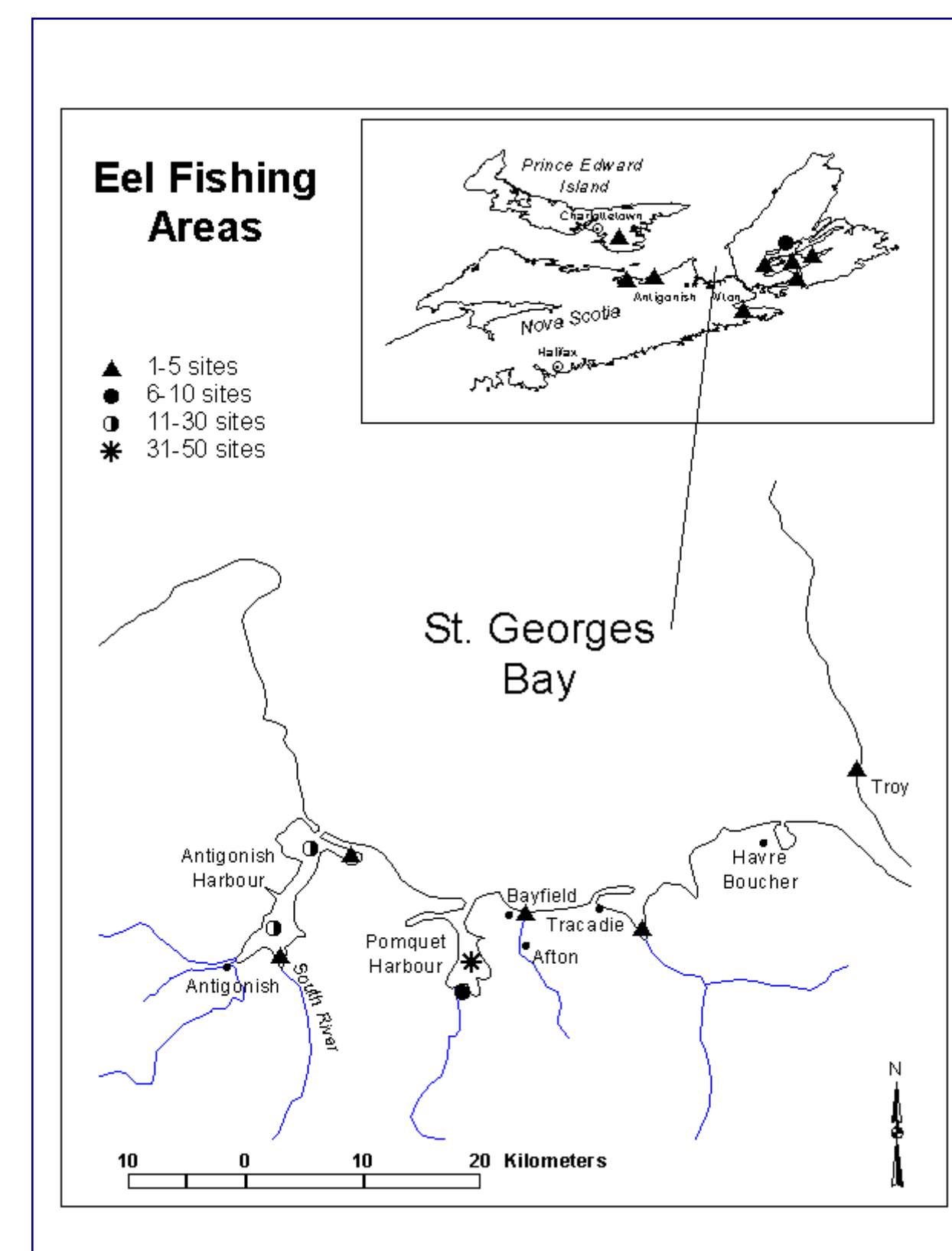
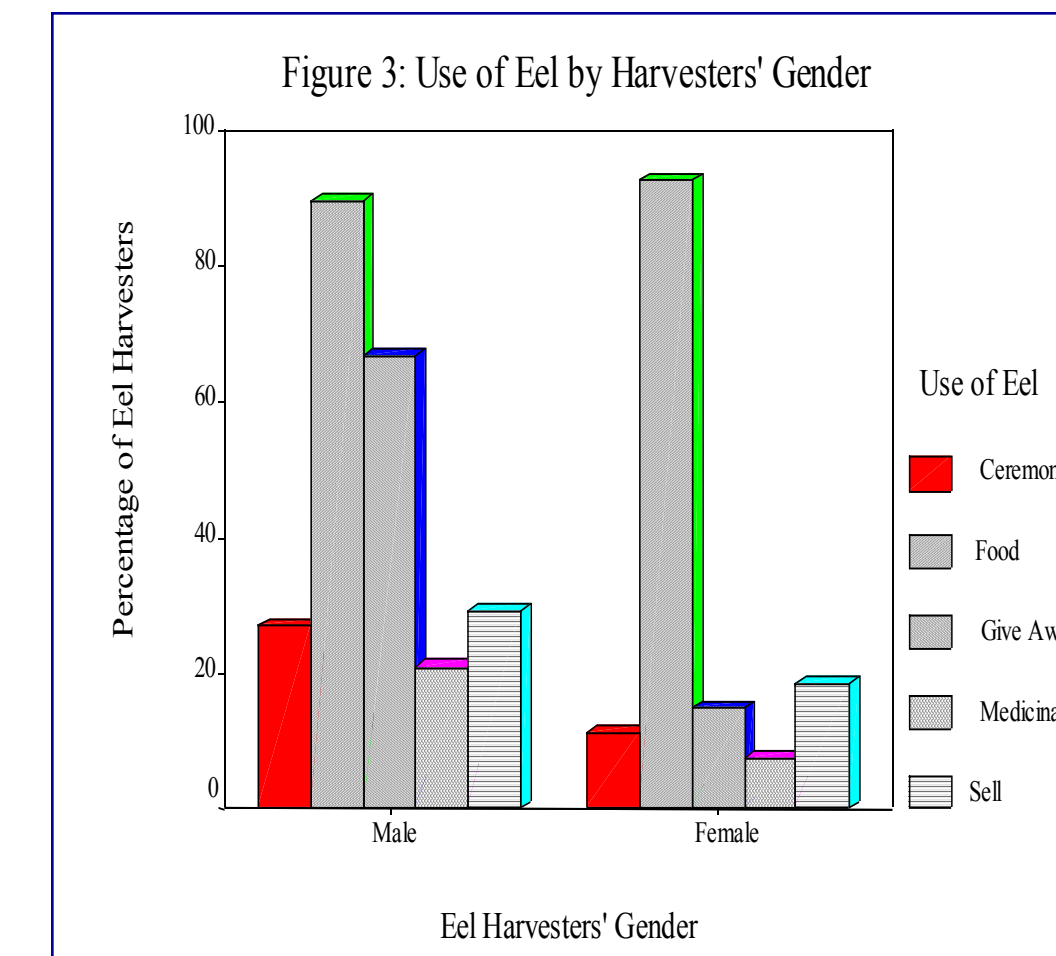
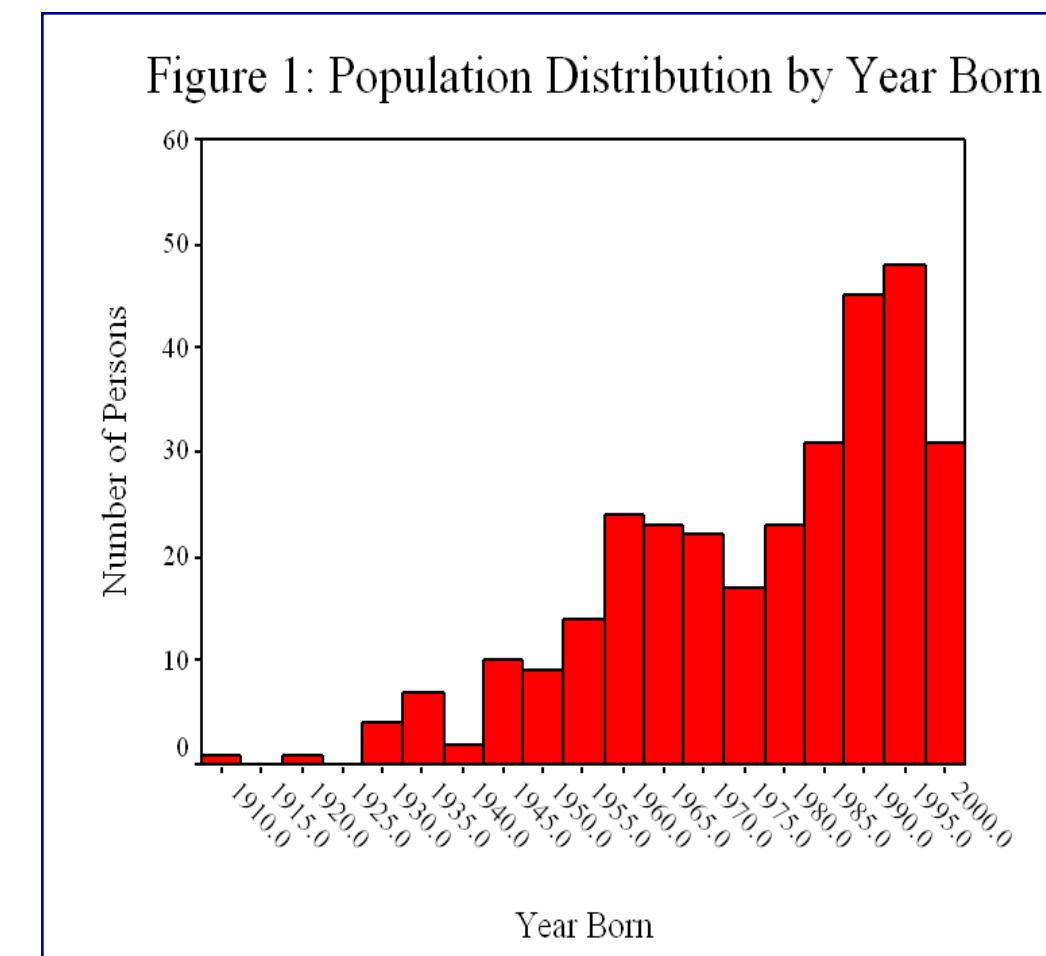
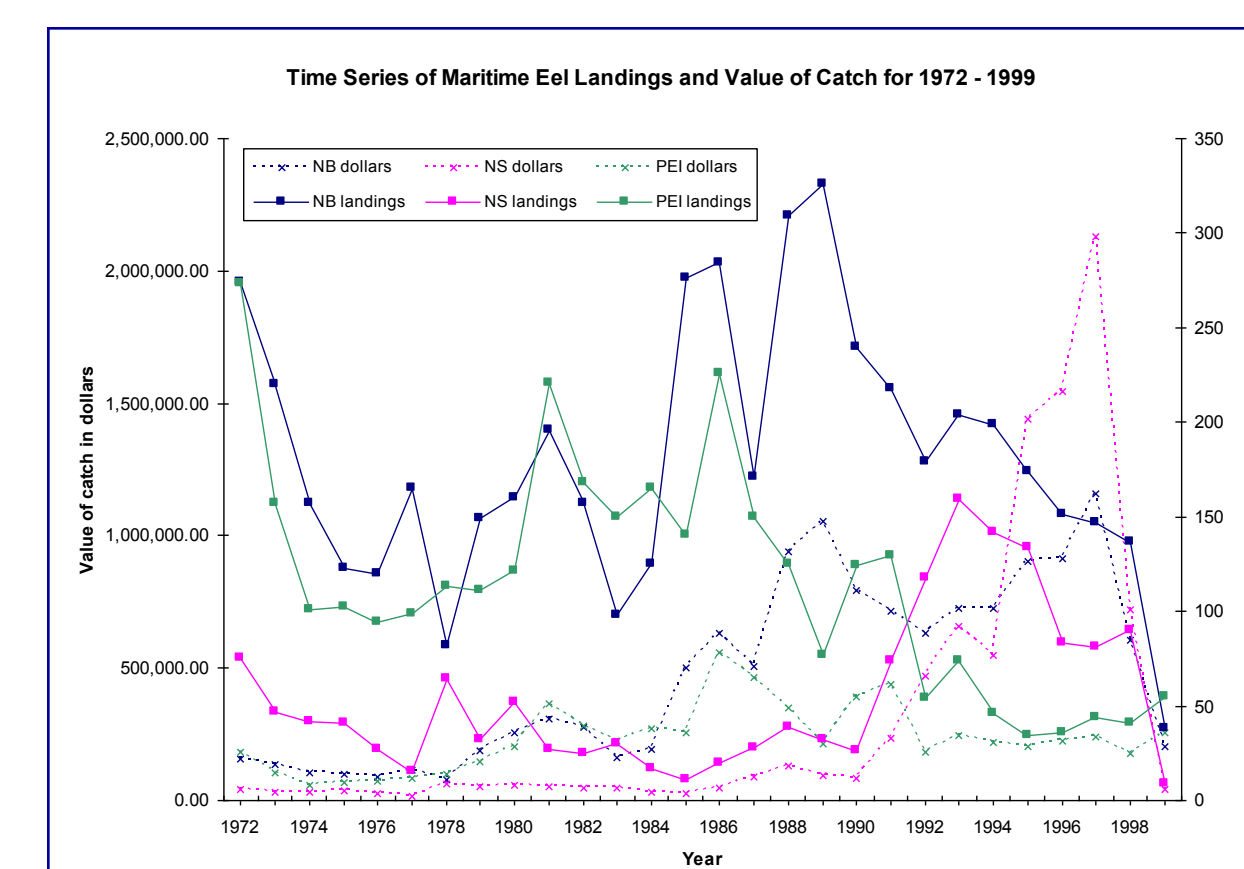
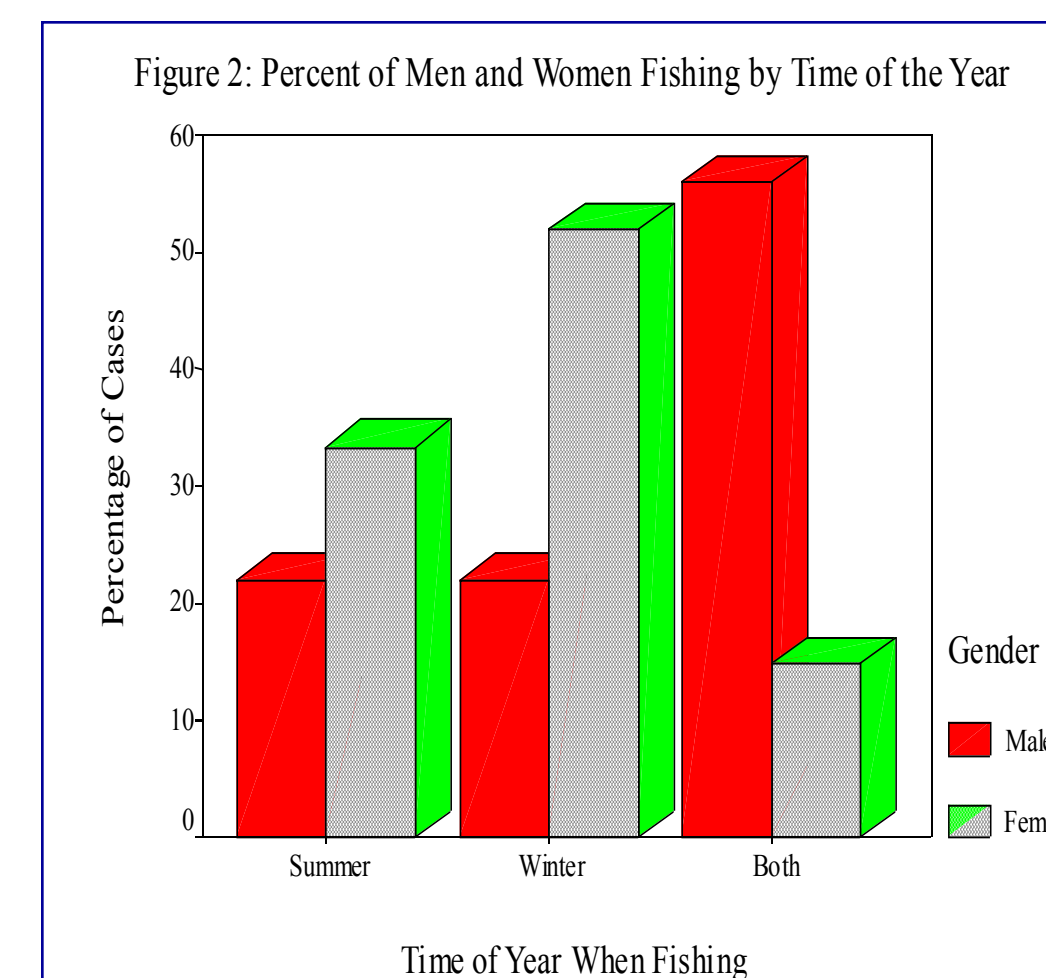


Table 1: Participation in Eel Fishing by Age and Gender

Age Categories	Gender	
	Male (N=53) %	Female (N=27) %
42 Years to Oldest	80.6	39.3
27 to 41 Years	55.2	32.4
15 to 26 Years	22.6	15.2
8 to 14 Years	9.7	0.0
Youngest to 7 Years	0.0	0.0



## KEY FINDINGS

- The Paq'tnkek Band consists of 482 registered band members with 312 living on reserve. Out of the 98 households in the Paq'tnkek community, 93 households participated in the eel survey. The Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq have a keen interest in *Kat*.
- The median age of the on-reserve population was identified as 20 years. This finding suggests that the community is now facing serious concerns respecting provision of services.
- A population comprised of numerous youth and comparatively few elders within the community has created a social gap that is interrupting the transfer of knowledge from elders to youth concerning various qualities of Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq cultural and traditional practices.
- There is a sustained cultural and material connection between the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq and *Kat*. *Kat* continues to be harvested for food, ceremonial purposes and other uses. This indicates that the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq remain to this day culturally and spiritually connected to the land, the water and their resources, and that the connection remains unbroken.
- The Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq have harvested and continue to harvest *Kat* in a variety of specific locations within the Antigonish and Pomquet estuaries and watersheds.
- Further, *Kat* is used by the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq for ceremonial, medicinal and social purposes, as well as for food.
- But, recent trends in harvesting and use show that Paq'tnkek involvement with *Kat* is seriously declining, especially among the community's women and youth. This decline is likely linked to the decline in the eel population within the Antigonish-Paq'tnkek area. It is difficult to pass on customs and values in the uses of resources such as *Kat* when the resources themselves are in decline for reasons such as over-harvesting.
- Among the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq, *Kat* is mainly used as a food. Yet, the number of eel fishers compared to the number of people eating eel is disproportionate, i.e., there are comparatively few of the former relative to the latter. This indicates that Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq eel harvesters share a considerable portion of their catches with other community members and families. This practice shows that sharing remains a strong value among the Mi'kmaq.
- Paq'tnkek women also fish eel; but, they tend to participate in one of the seasons, either winter or summer, whereas men tend to fish year round.
- Eel consumption within the community has declined in recent times, particularly among young people. Those still eating eel do so most commonly in their grandparents' homes, rather than in their parents' homes.
- The experience with *Kat* as food and for other purposes has declined throughout the community in recent times. The decline among young people is especially notable. Few report eating *Kat* in relatives' and friends' homes as well as in settings such as funerals, feasts, and gatherings.

## IMPLICATIONS

- The Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq are documented as having a sustained cultural and material relationship with *Kat*.
- The Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq are documented as having fished *Kat* for a considerable period of time within particular places in local watersheds and estuaries.
- Recent and dramatic declines in the abundance of American Eel are affecting Mi'kmaq access to, use of, and cultural relations with *Kat*.
- These conditions are contributing to the cultural deterioration of the Mi'kmaq relation with and knowledge of *Kat*.
- Immediate action is needed in order preserve the knowledge of elders and to promote the transfer of knowledge from elders to young people.
- The information concerning use of and relations with *Kat* support Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq exercise of  *treaty entitlements*  respecting control and management of American Eel. This initiative, with a self-governance strategy, would assist in preserving, reconstituting and re-affirming the Mi'kmaq relation with *Kat*.
- This research also illustrates the failure of the federal government to implement effectively food and ceremonial fisheries  *treaty entitlements* .
- This work demonstrates that fully collaborative research processes provide results-rich outcomes.



Many of those interviewed mentioned several deceased persons as knowing a lot about fishing, preparing, and cooking *Kat*. This reflects the fact that Mi'kmaq keep in living memory those who have passed on. The knowledge and regard for these people lives. In the Mi'kmaq language the importance and memory of the people who have passed on is indicated in the use of a new assigned name. An extra suffix *o'q* is added to the deceased person's first name, as the absentee case. This indicated that the person named is no longer with us - at least in the worldly conscious sense.