

# Garibaldi Seafood Initiative: Interview Results & Seafood Worker Profiles

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## Introduction & Methodology

Strategies around industry development often focus on the big picture, and for good reason. Large scale indicators can broadly frame the macroeconomic story by showcasing changes in employment, wages, and supply chains. These measures can tell an economic developer what issues are generally the most pressing, and can begin to point to solutions to industry problems. However, without taking into account the stories and challenges of individual level business owners and workers, the story of an industry, as told by graphs and reports, is incomplete.

The Garibaldi Seafood Initiative has been seeking to develop a greater understanding of the issues facing the local seafood industry. Once the primary economic driver of the region, technological and economic changes have shaped the industry to be a mixture of large businesses with boats, processing facilities, and distribution networks, and smaller, lower capacity businesses that maintain a niche within the industry. This has resulted in challenges for some of the small fishing businesses, processing facilities, and restaurants who have to compete with larger companies who benefit from economies of scale.

These challenges, while very real, do not always appear on economic data sets. Positive changes in aggregate do not always result in positive changes for the individual; in diverse industries like the seafood industry, this is vital to understand. Neither does the data tell the individual stories of the captains, the crewmen, the dock workers, or the small business owners that are working to grow their business, reach their business aspirations, or simply meet their personal needs.

Because of this, this research takes a different approach. Instead of focusing on big data sets, this report focuses on contextualizing information with direct quotes from captains, crew members, business owners, and dock workers. This research uses this interview data to identify the general thoughts and concerns of these types of seafood industry workers.

In early 2019, the Garibaldi Seafood Initiative conducted 25 interviews with local seafood industry stakeholders including Boat Captains (16), Small Seafood Processing Business Owners/Managers and Seafood Retailers (11), Deck Crewmen (7), and Dock Workers (6), many of whom play multiple roles. Interviewees were asked questions about their personal challenges, their business challenges, their aspirations for themselves, their businesses, and the Port as a whole. This report discusses the themes mentioned by stakeholders, and based on those themes makes some basic recommendations for further action.

# Seafood Worker Profiles

## Boat Captains/Owners (16 interviewed)

**Opportunities:** Business Expansion, Potential Business Connections

**Major Challenges:** Business Succession, Safety, Port Infrastructure Limitations

Some of them are journeymen—fishing around the globe as well as out of Garibaldi. Others have fished from Garibaldi their entire lives and have no plans to leave. Most captains interviewed explicitly stated that they had spent their lifetime fishing. While there were boat captains interviewed ranging between 25 and 34 years old, the majority were at least 45. Even though some of the captains interviewed were in their 50s and older, and although some dealt with chronic pain while working, none had plans on retiring in the next 10 years. “When you’re doing things that you love, the pain kind of subsides enough to get through it. Because your passion and your heart take over. And that’s really healing. So I’m going to fish until I can’t.” While none had specific retirement plans, several mentioned the need for retirement and succession plans for the sake of their fishing business.

When listening to their stories, one quickly learns that captains are natural entrepreneurs. Not only do they manage their own fishing businesses, many choose to run other businesses. Some of these are fishing related, including ice, bait, and equipment sales, others run unrelated businesses in the off-season. One-third of interviewed captains had another source of income outside of fishing, whether that be another job or another business. The willingness of captains to work multiple jobs both showcases their “hustle”, as one captain called it, but also points to a specific challenge of the job. One-half of responding captains said that job stability was a primary threat to their futures in the seafood industry. “If there is a bad season, no one can work - there are no guarantees. You don’t just show up to work and get paid like a normal job. Of course, that’s part of the reason we all love it, but how do you explain that? People just don’t understand unless they’ve done it.” Nonetheless, even with job insecurity and other challenges of being a captain, captains are the best off financially of all seafood groups interviewed. A higher proportion of captains reported having incomes of over \$75,000 and fewer captains reported struggling with finances over the past three years than any other group interviewed.

However, captains and boat owners in Garibaldi face significant business challenges. While some would like to expand their operations, some feel limited by the port. “[If] you had ice - you had infrastructure - there’s no infrastructure in Garibaldi. I’ve asked the Port about ice - they say “oh, it’s just a losing proposition”...it is, maybe, but the whole thing is that it will bring in more boats - tuna boats, sport boats, salmon boats that are up and down the coast...but there’s still a problem with it being so shallow here.”

While interviewed captains mentioned many options for selling their product, about a half said they were unsatisfied with the available options. “I would like to see more live buyers like they have in Newport. They are not there every day of the week, but if there was a crane facility they could use and a place on the pier/dock they could park their trucks, I’m sure they would come

here, if there were boats that would deliver to them.” Most want direct access to customers, while others are interested in having additional access to processors. There were also fishermen who mentioned being interested in developing local branding.

It is also worth noting the inherent danger of fishing. Generally considered the second most dangerous profession in America after logging, approximately 86 fishermen die per 100,000 workers per year. Fishing out of Garibaldi is particularly dangerous; from 2003 to 2010, 17 people died traversing the Garibaldi Jetty. The danger of the jetty and fishing in general create challenges for captains both in their operations and in insuring their businesses.

## Seafood Processing/Retail Business Owners (11 interviewed)

**Opportunities:** Business Expansion

**Major Challenges:** Workforce Challenges, Cost of Doing Business

While these business owners are more likely to rely on their business as their sole source of income than captains, they share a similar entrepreneurial spirit. Several business owners referenced how they had expanded their businesses well beyond their original scope. Restaurant owners building food trucks, fishermen conducting off-season boat tours, and processors expanding their businesses to include additional products were all mentioned as examples of entrepreneurial ventures.

Seafood business owners also experience significant business challenges. Because the cost of living on the coast is so high, many struggle to find quality workers. Even once they find workers, keeping them can be a challenge. “You know it’s seafood, and my orders are up and down, so I can’t guarantee 30-40 hours a week. I have to guarantee that to my full-time people, so my part-time people are on-call, just if I need them. And a lot of people I have have other jobs, so I have to work around their other job schedule, and make it work. If I can’t get them to work then that means I have to do the job of two or three other people to get the work done.”

Seafood business owners, like captains, are more well off than dock workers and crew members in the seafood sector. They enjoy much more stability in income and housing, however seafood business owners are not all the same. Some business owners, particularly those with newer businesses, still struggle to keep a stable income and struggle to meet household needs.

## Crew Members (7 interviewed)

**Opportunities:** Potential Entrepreneurs

**Major Challenges:** Housing, Income Stability, Financial Security

Small business owners and captains often face a different set of challenges than their workers. While the work environments may be similar or the same, the job requirements, pay, reputation, and benefits have implications on the quality of life of workers.

Crew members struggle the most of all groups we interviewed; all but one mentioned that they had challenges meeting their personal or financial needs in the past three years. This is likely due to a combination of factors, including their lower rate of pay, their status as contractors rather than regular employees, and the high cost of living along the coast. Some crew members specifically mentioned the challenge of finding affordable housing along the coast: “Everything’s catered to people who have money here. Like rentals, and Airbnbs...it’s expensive. And it’s getting worse.” Additionally confounding is taxes and the instability of pay; being contractors in an irregular industry, crew members are not paid on a regular schedule, rather, many are paid when the product is sold. This means that crew members can go multiple months without seeing a paycheck.

Nonetheless, crew members are a persistent and ambitious group; many still seek to not just stay in the seafood industry, but they also aspire to own their own boats and start their own businesses. However, they are well aware of the challenges: “The path looks like it’s a gnarly uphill climb...not exactly sure how to figure out the money and the financial part of things...and especially with the unsteadiness of the fisheries futures...seems like a big step to take.” Being able to finance their ventures is the greatest obstacle to their businesses success. There are major capital expenditures that are required when starting a new fishing business, biggest of all being a boat. However, the primary concern of crew members turned entrepreneurs is the cost and availability of permits. There is a perception amongst those interested in starting their own business that “the way things are going, you might start to see a reduction in the number of permits out there, because things might be - you don’t want to overharvest the ocean. It can’t just be a free for all.”

## **Dock Workers (6 interviewed)**

**Opportunities:** Upward Job Mobility

**Major Challenges:** Income Stability, Financial Security, Housing

While job stability is higher for dock workers than crew members, there are a number of challenges around stability of income. Much like crew members, the pay schedule for many dock workers is not regular. “It goes up and down, so you always need to have something in your back pocket to fall back to if you’re not working on the dock or on a boat.” This has implications for the ability of dock workers to meet their personal and household needs. The majority of dock workers interviewed stated that they had trouble meeting their financial needs over the past 3 years. Dock workers also struggle with the high cost of living along the coast, the cost of housing, as well as the cost of insurance.

Unlike crew members, dock workers had the least clear vision of a future in the seafood industry. While dock workers and crew members face similar issues, some dock workers interviewed expressed concern about remaining in the industry over time. However, a number of interviewees mentioned that they had experienced upward mobility in their profession, moving from entry level jobs to trainers and managers. None interviewed expressed interest in

developing their own businesses, however, due to the small sample size, it is not indicative that that desire does not exist amongst other dock workers.

## Data Findings & Recommendations

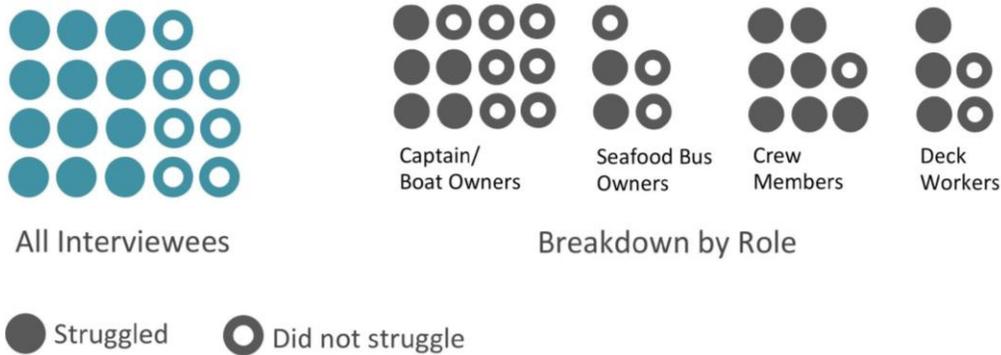
This section includes some of the more notable data that emerged from the interviews, and then a set of recommendations to consider as the Garibaldi Seafood Initiative enters its next phase of work.

### Findings

Particularly notable was the proportion of interviewees that mentioned that they had struggled economically to meet their household needs over the previous three years. The underlying causes are multifaceted.

### Financial Struggles

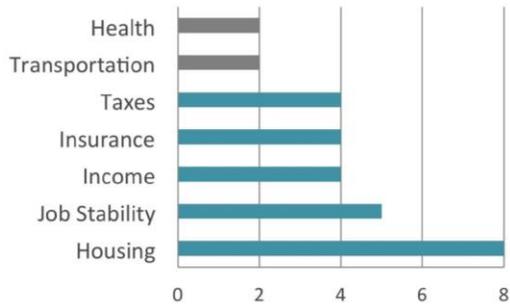
Almost **two thirds** of interviewees reported financial struggles. Crew members and deck hands were particularly affected.



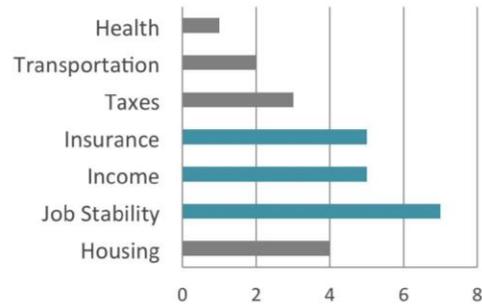
Interviewees were asked to rank their personal and business challenges by category:

### Personal Challenges

*Income, job stability and insurance are challenging across the board, but housing and taxes are specifically challenging for crew and dock workers.*



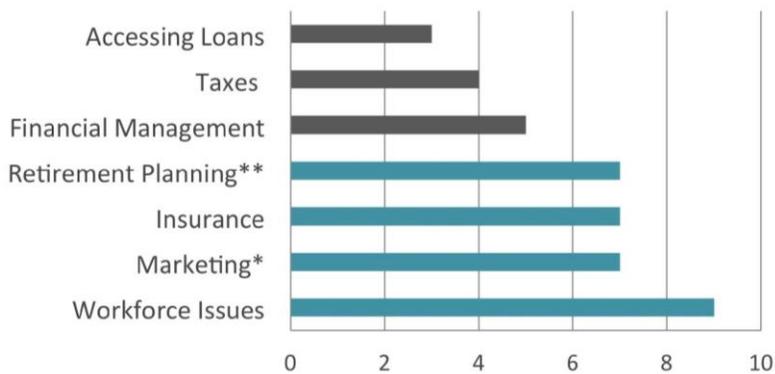
Personal challenges reported by **dock workers and crew members**



Personal challenges reported by **captain/boat owners and business owners**

## Businesses Challenges

*Reported by Captains and Seafood Business Owners*



Business challenges reported by **17 captains/business owners**

\*Seven captains / business owners said they are not satisfied with their current options for selling their product.

\*\*None of the captains or small business owners plan to retire in the next 10 years, and none have a retirement plan.

## Recommendations

The issues facing those who work in the seafood sector are extremely broad in scope and often interrelated, and solutions range in feasibility. While some business and personal issues are unlikely to be solved without significant measures, there are many opportunities to support the seafood industry, and there are opportunities to support seafood stakeholders within each of the subgroups. It is also worth noting that support to one group can help another group. For example, building stronger relationships between seafood businesses and buyers can result in more sales and better prices for fishermen. Support to crew members and dock workers to build skills can help fishermen and business owners with more effective workers.

We recommend consideration of the following:

**Business & Entrepreneurial Support:** There are many ways that the Garibaldi Seafood Initiative can look to provide business support to the seafood sector. Providing for the future will be vital, and the Initiative should identify ways to support those in the industry who are interested in starting their own businesses, grow their businesses, or

want to begin fishing. The initiative can also work with partners and stakeholders to address workforce issues by working with the SBDC and Community College to better prepare workers for the sector, and to find ways to connect businesses with workers.

**Insurance & Transportation:** Instability of income is a primary challenge for many in the sector, due to the inconsistent nature of the fishing industry. However, this problem leads to a series of other challenges including challenges paying for transportation, insurance, and taxes. Providing assistance to workers to understand options and enroll in insurance, and to identify transportation options could help workers overcome some financial barriers.

**Taxes:** Since many crew members work contractually and captains have unique sources of income, assistance with taxes would be another method of helping crew members, dock workers, captains, and business owners alike. Many of those interviewed do taxes themselves, but about half requested additional assistance with their taxes.

**Distribution, Processing, & Infrastructure:** There is likely room for additional distribution and processing channels for both fishermen and small businesses to sell their product. Several fisherman noted that they wished that there were more opportunities to sell their product at the docks. Newport was seen as particular model where fishermen had ample opportunity to sell their product. However the fishermen also say that infrastructural updates, including additional freezing capacity, a faster hoist, and more delivery trucks may be necessary in order for this to be viable.

**Retirement & Succession Planning:** There are two problems that, while each individually difficult challenges, may be solvable together. While a fifth of the interviewed fishermen were nearing retirement age, none had plans for succession. At the same time, many of the crew members and dock workers interviewed had plans for continuing their careers in the fishing industry, with seven specifically mentioning that they were interested in becoming fishermen and owning their own boat and business. While these may not clearly lay out a course of action, there likely is a need for programming. Succession planning programming could assist many older fishermen in creating a plan for their retirement. However, there is still a need to help transfer wealth, intellectual and experiential as well as financial. Developing programming to transfer the experiences and knowledge of older fishermen to aspiring entrepreneurs may help ensure the future of the seafood industry in Garibaldi.

**Safety & Housing:** Safety and housing were two common issues of concern of seafood industry workers that are unlikely to be effectively addressed through the Garibaldi Seafood Initiative. Both would require significant investment and partnerships in order to fulfill the needs of seafood workers.

With regard to safety, the primary challenge is fixing the Garibaldi jetty. While the current state of the jetty is a major safety concern, fixing it will require the approval and investment of multiple actors at the local, state, and particularly the federal level. The Port is currently making every effort to secure the required funding and partnerships.

Housing is also a challenging problem to address. While government agencies have commonly developed housing assistance programs or built public housing, these programs are expensive and sometimes undesirable. One recommendation that was commonly requested from seafood workers was that the Port open allow fishermen to live on their boats. Unfortunately, due to sanitation issues, this is not a feasible solution. The recommendation for housing might be to participate in the wider county housing efforts to ensure that the needs of the seafood sector are represented and heard.

Moving forward, the Garibaldi Seafood Initiative partners will want to address the underlying causes of these economic challenges as well as supporting the aspirations of those working in the seafood sector in Garibaldi. Interviewees were asked what they saw as their vision for Garibaldi in the next 5 years. Some interviewees gave general sentiments ranging from the importance of the port's culture, to the need for more traffic and more events. Others had more specific suggestions including recommendations for infrastructure repairs and improvements.

## Vision of Garibaldi in Five Years

