

Gooseneck Barnacles Back on the Menu

Only about three percent of the gooseneck barnacles on any given rock are the right size for market.

Nuu-chah-nulth people have long known them as *čaʔinwa*, but this month Vancouverites reacquainted themselves with the crustacean known to the culinary world as the gooseneck barnacle. That's because Nuu-chah-nulth harvesters were back gathering goosenecks after negotiations between Canada and five First Nations resulted in a small gooseneck fishery—the first commercial gooseneck fishery in more than eight years.

In the fishery's first major sale, Ahousaht fishers Keon Frank Sr. and John James sold approximately 150 pounds to Trilogy Fish Co., who took them to Vancouver for market testing at restaurants. Not long after, those barnacles began appearing on menus around the city. The accompanying buzz was music to the ears of the Nuu-chah-nulth harvesters.

"There is more and more interest every week," said Joe David, a Tla-o-qui-aht barnacle harvester. "The excitement seems to be building."

Active since Fisheries and Oceans Canada authorized the fishery earlier this fall, David calls himself one of the older guys. "We started in the early 90's. Back then it was a pretty viable business," he said.

According to David, harvesters included both First Nations and non-First Nations. "There were about 30-40 of us at the time. That meant we could fill all the orders that came through." Today the half

dozen harvesters aren't yet generating the order volume of the 1990s, but David is hopeful that will change as more harvesters get involved and market demand increases.

"We want to train new harvesters in proper harvesting and the safety aspects, but now isn't the best time due to the weather," he adds.

Harvesters typically gather gooseneck barnacles at low tides, which occur mostly in the dark during the winter months. Summer is a better time for new harvesters to learn the ropes, says David. He and other seasoned harvesters plan to help with a training program in the spring of 2014. He's taking part in this year's fishery to help "reboot the market and reengage fishers after the long closure."

That closure came in 2005 when policy changes from Fisheries and Oceans Canada shut down the commercial gooseneck barnacle harvest. Subsequent studies have since shown that the fishery has little impact on surrounding species and populations regenerate quickly if harvested selectively. The fishery also has a built-in regulator.

"Only about three percent of the barnacles on any given rock are good for market," says Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council biologist, Candace Picco. "That limits how much gets taken. We also do biological assessments. Each rock has a threshold that it can handle. Harvesters respect that threshold because they want this fishery for the long term."

One of two fisheries resulting from the *Ahousaht et al vs Canada* court case, the gooseneck barnacle fishery is currently open to designated harvesters from Tla-o-qui-aht, Ehattesaht/Chinehkint, Hesquiaht, Ahousaht, and Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations.

Those harvesters are being careful with what they see as an important resource and business opportunity. "We're being mindful of the harvest sites. We want to do this properly in every respect. This will be a viable business providing we do everything properly," says David.

For more information on the Nuu-chah-nulth gooseneck barnacle harvest, contact Candace Picco at 250-725-3899 or at candace.picco@nuuchahnulth.org. You can also find out more on Facebook by searching for "T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries."

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Above: NTC biologist Candace Picco learns from barnacle harvester Joe David near Tofino. Harvesters use a long pole fitted with a blunt blade to pry barnacles from the rocks.



Gooseneck barnacles are a delicacy in countries like Spain and Portugal where they are known as "percebes."

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