



## **Native fishery profits raise ire**

Critics say non-aboriginal made big bucks from program

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INDIAN BROOK — The people of this First Nation community aren't profiting from a \$5-million fisheries deal as much as non-natives, critics say.

A source in the Yarmouth fishing community said Thursday that native fishing agreements have been a windfall for many local boat captains and businesses.

"Those boats were making money big-time on the natives — they had maybe one native guy on board and the rest were non-natives. The captain gets a cut, the crew gets a cut — what do the natives get?" said the source.

Others say an influential and well-connected Wedgeport businessman brokered an exclusive deal last year with a group of band councillors to sell them boats and equipment and buy their fish.

Reg LeBlanc, president of International Marine Brokers and of Wedgeport Lobsters Inc., was reluctant to discuss the matter when contacted Thursday afternoon.

He did say International Marine Brokers facilitated the sale of 10 fishing boats to Indian Brook Fisheries Inc., a company formed by a group of councillors in defiance of two community referendums, the chief and three councillors in the community.

"Ten boats were purchased through International Marine Brokers," said Mr. LeBlanc.

As for over \$350,000 in payments he received from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans this year, Mr. LeBlanc said the money was payment for used fishing gear that went to Indian Brook Fisheries.

"It was a lot less than \$400,000. . . . Anyone (who) wants to come and look at the books are more than welcome," he said, before ending the phone conversation.

Mr. LeBlanc's company, Wedgeport Lobster Ltd. of Lower Wedgeport, was given over \$104,000 in federal funding on Jan. 4, according to a DFO website that details grants and contributions worth over \$25,000 given under the native fisheries access initiative.

On Jan. 17, the same company was given over \$36,000. A firm referred to as Wedgeport Lobsters Ltd. of Ingonish was given \$210,000 on March 3, the website states.

Mr. LeBlanc ended the interview before he could be asked about allegations he worked out a deal with the native-owned company to be the exclusive buyer of the fish landed on native licences.

The group holds nine lobster licences in Area 34, a fishing zone off the coast of southwest Nova Scotia, as well as licences for crab, swordfish, clam, scallop and other species.

One source said Mr. LeBlanc also loaned money to Indian Brook Fisheries to finance operations before the group officially signed the contribution arrangement with DFO.

Jim Maloney is the former co-ordinator of safety and the fit-to-work program for Indian Brook Fisheries.

"This deal was a handshake agreement but, let me tell you, it was common knowledge he (Mr. LeBlanc) would handle all the financials — he loaned them at least \$200,000 that I know of," said Mr. Maloney.

"You have to wonder why they bought so many vehicles and equipment last fall when they didn't actually sign the deal until Dec. 4. By that time they'd spent about \$1.5 million of a \$5-million deal.

"They had no choice but to sign that deal then and who knows how much they owed Mr. LeBlanc."

Dane Devine is president of Novi Boat Brokers of Yarmouth and he makes no secret that he's in competition with Mr. LeBlanc's boat brokering company. Mr. Devine said he is frustrated by what he views as an unfair environment.

"I've been in this business for two to three years and I've had zero government assistance — I employ between 18 and 25 people full time and I can tell you I don't know how they're getting all this money," he said.

Mr. Devine said his company was completely shut out from selling the native group any boats.

"The deals were done in the backroom. All I'm saying is it should have been a level playing field — let all the boat brokers get a chance and then the native company can get the best deal," he said.

Stephen Michael of Indian Brook Fisheries Inc. did not return calls.

Cathy Stewart, who heads up the Aboriginal Fisheries section for DFO in this province, said the department conducts all business according to Treasury Board standards and Indian Brook Fisheries is living up to the arrangement signed by the councillors.

Ms. Stewart said every report from Indian Brook Fisheries has been documented properly and procedures have been followed scrupulously.

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