

“A Good Feed”:

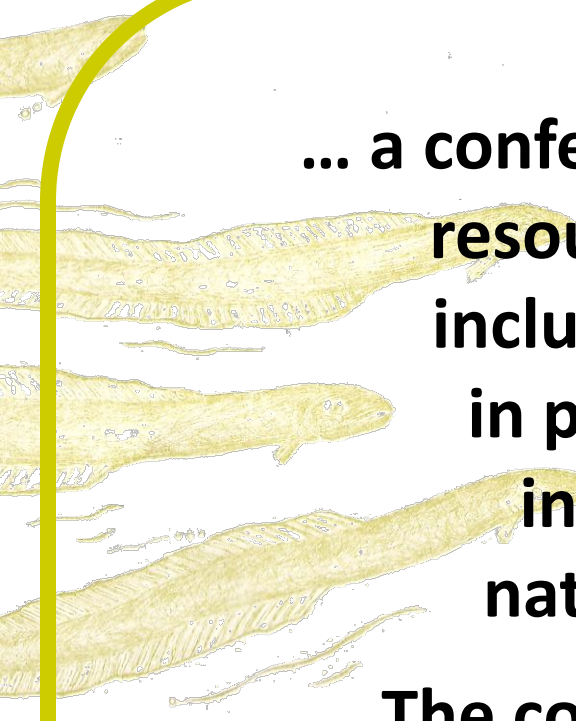
Reverence for eels as a guiding principle for traditional ecological knowledge and management among participants in the Mi'kmaq food and ceremonial fishery in Cape Breton, NS

Sana Kavanagh

School for Resource and Environmental Studies, Dalhousie U.
Institute for Integrative Science and Health, Cape Breton U.

*"People in Places: Engaging Together in Integrated Resource Management"
conference hosted by Coastal CURA*

at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, 26-29 June 2011

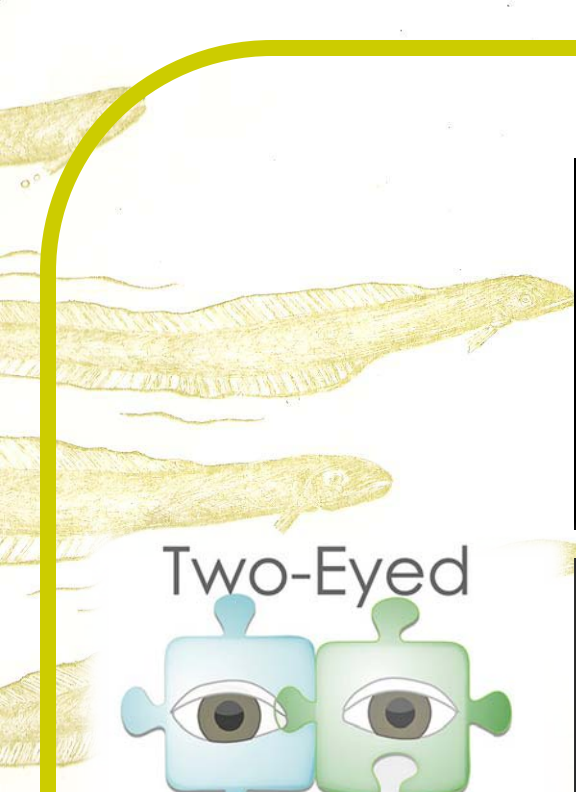
A decorative yellow brushstroke graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of several horizontal, overlapping strokes that resemble a watercolor or paint effect.

... a conference to focus on the inclusion of resource dependent communities, including Aboriginal communities, in processes of spatial planning, integrated management and natural resource management.

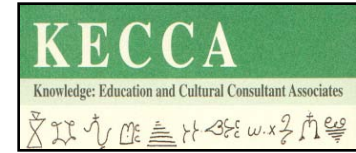
**The conference's overarching theme :
How can place-based communities become better engaged in natural resource integrated management?**

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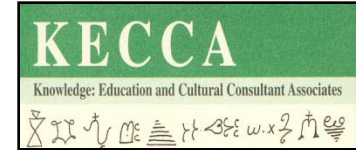
ABSTRACT: Traditional ecological knowledge and management of eels among Mi'kmaq participants in the aboriginal food and ceremonial fishery in Unama'ki (Cape Breton) includes values such as respect and reverence for eels as a source of life. In this presentation, I explore a key theme, "a good feed", which emerged through qualitative analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 12 community-recommended eel fishery participants, from 4 Mi'kmaq communities. Participants explain that part of their traditional ecological knowledge is self-management, through which they limit the size of their harvest to a "good feed". According to participants, a "good feed" is enough eels for themselves and sometimes for others to eat, without greed or waste. Examples given by participants show that determining a "good feed" is highly contextual. Similarly, participants explain that they self-manage by limiting waste from their harvest - although they define waste and non-waste in a unique way based on reciprocity. According to participants, reverence is the guiding principle for thinking and acting in the context of the traditional food system such that harvest of eels is reciprocated to the eel or the water - its ecosystem. When they speak about their traditional way of life, participants delineate appropriate and inappropriate ways of fishing for eels and other species. Several participants argue that their practices, based on respect and reverence, have sustained the eel population and their ability to procure eels for food. In contrast, they argue, based on their life experience with different management paradigms, that some other fisheries are both irreverent and unsustainable. Using quotations and thick description, I try to portray the unique cultural perspective on sustainability among these participants and how they link their ecological knowledge, practices, and values. [Funding for this research was provided by the Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Integrative Science Dr. Cheryl Bartlett at Cape Breton University].



Albert Marshall
Mi'kmaq Elder, Eskasoni FN
Elder Advisor, Integrative Science



Murdena Marshall
Mi'kmaq Elder, Eskasoni FN
Elder Advisor, Integrative Science
Professor of Mi'kmaq Studies
(retired), Cape Breton University



Cheryl Bartlett
CRC, Integrative Science
Professor of Biology
Cape Breton University





Eastern Canada

Native Council of Nova Scotia
Mi'kmaq Language Program
Artist: Michael J. Martin



Kataq

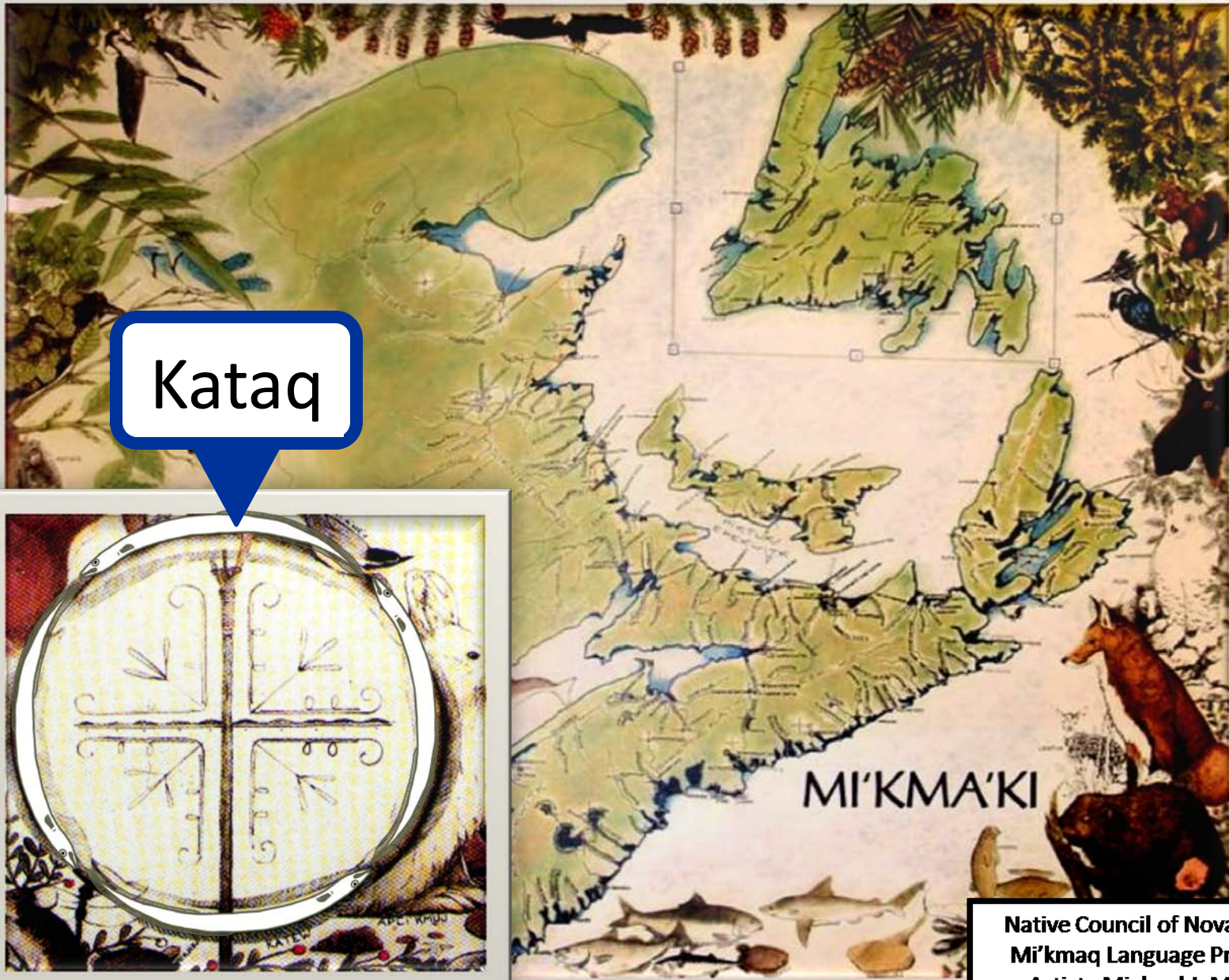


Photo by Brian Coad



Native Council of Nova Scotia
Mi'kmaq Language Program
Artist: Michael J. Martin

Kataq



Native Council of Nova Scotia
Mi'kmaq Language Program
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Kataq

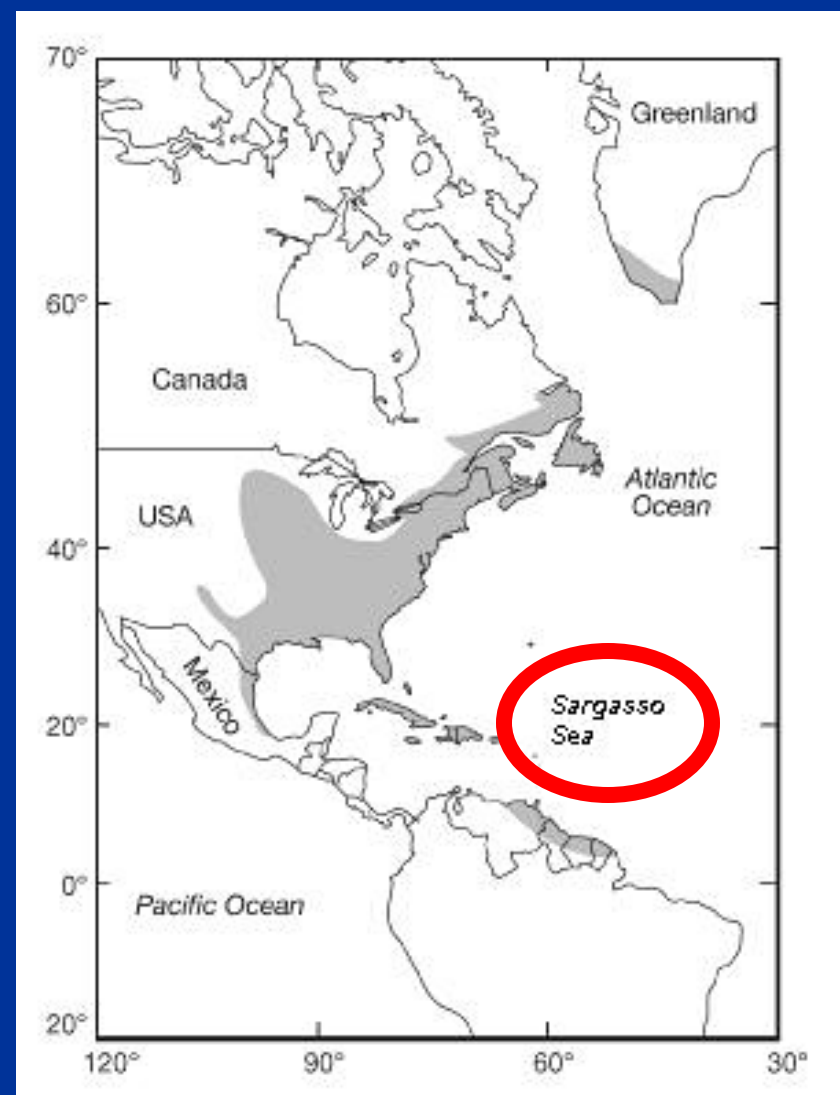
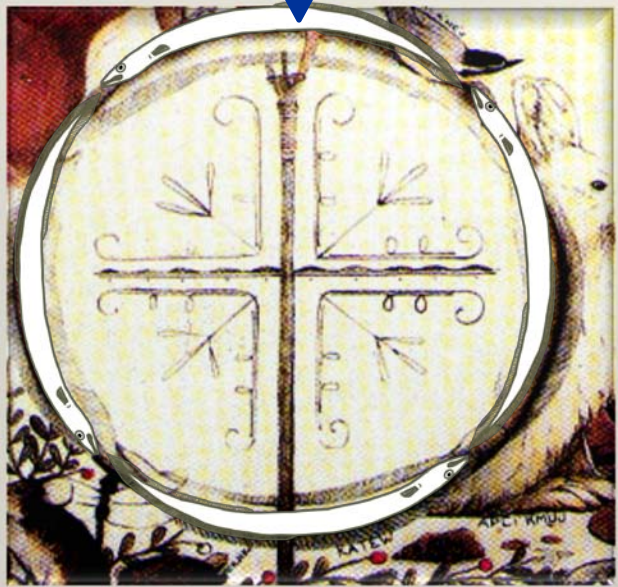
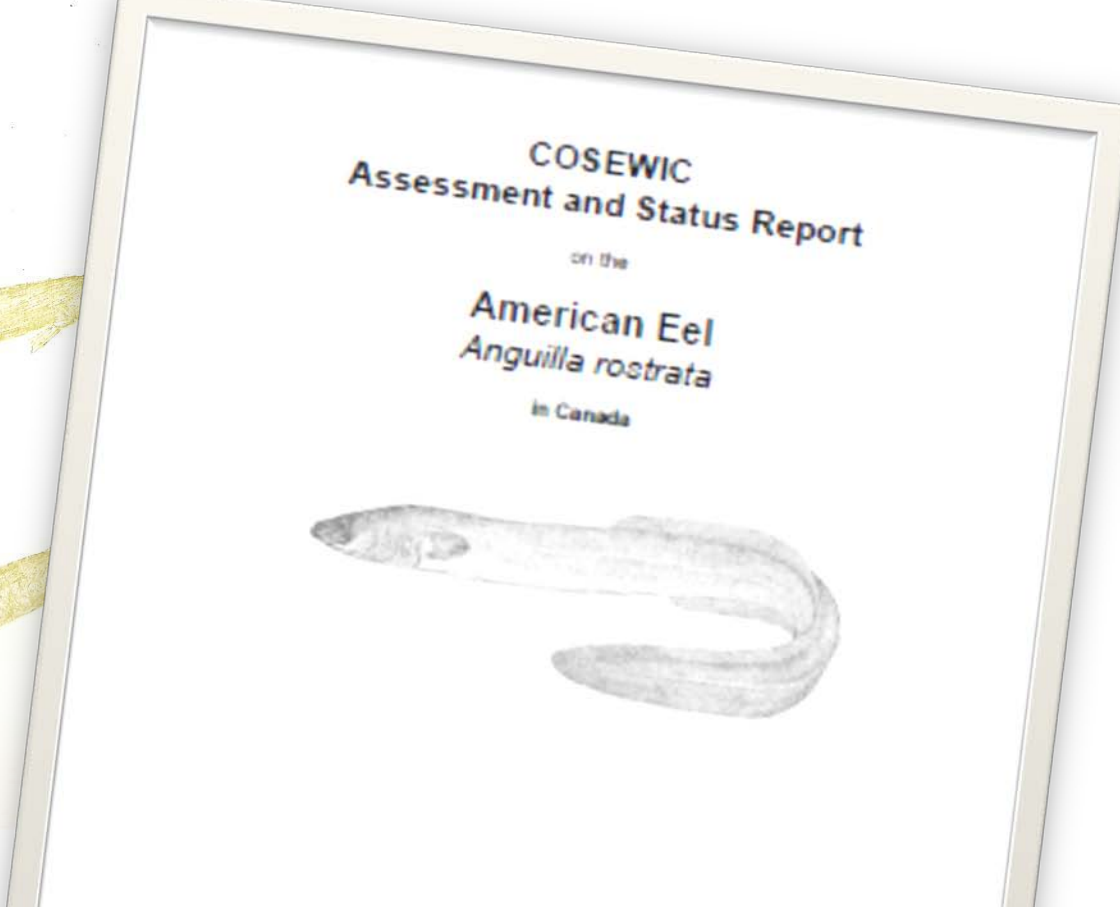


Image by DFO 2006

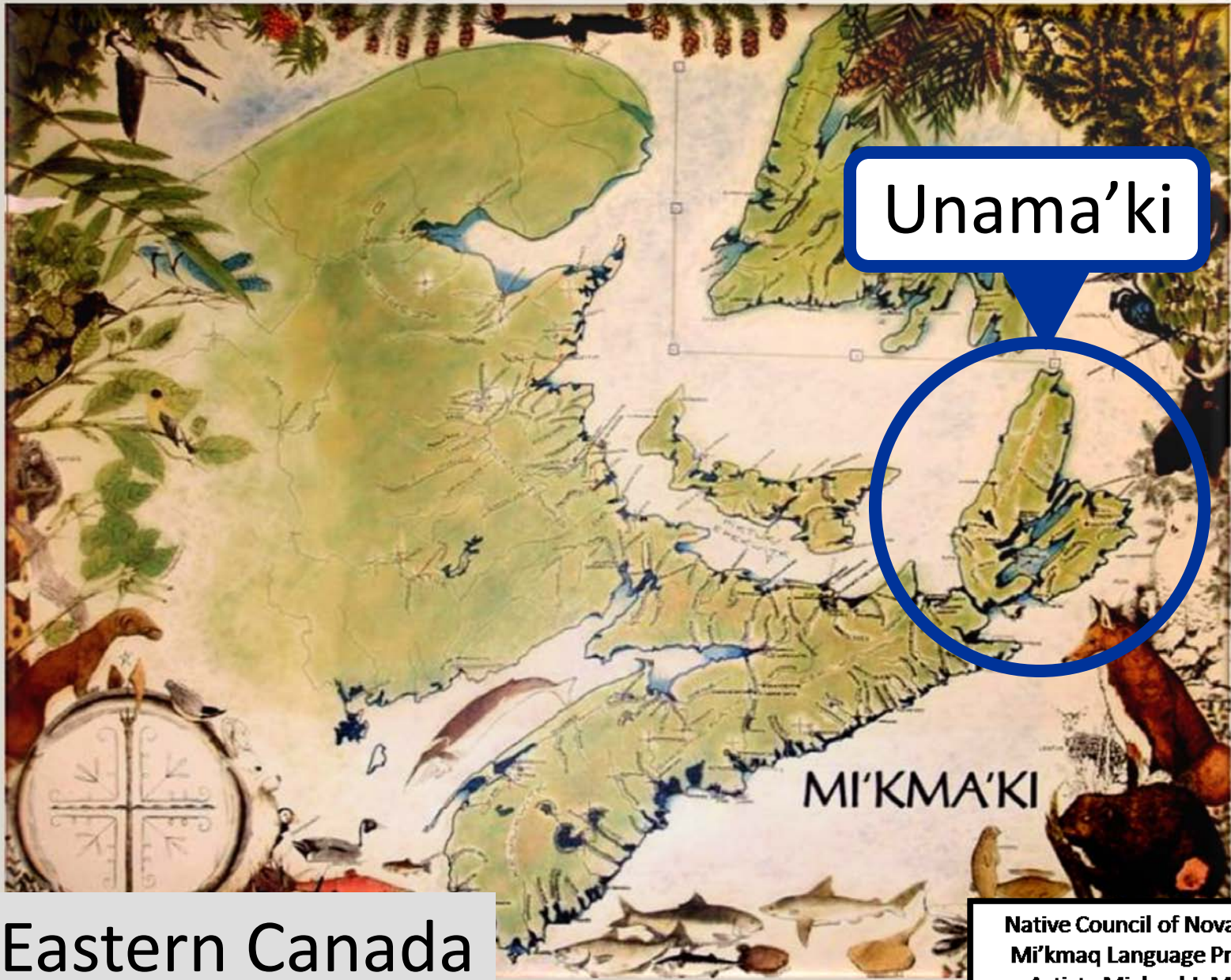
Native Council of Nova Scotia
Mi'kmaq Language Program
Artist: Michael J. Martin



- Decline of eels threatens relationship (SRSF & PFWS 2002)
- Special Significance of Species (COSEWIC 2006)

Qualitative Research Strategy

- Community and university ethics protocols
- 11 community or elder-referred participants
- Semi-structured in depth interviews
- Open-ended questions
- Community liaison or elder present
- Informed consent
- Visual interview guides
- Audio record and transcription
- Thematic analysis - interpretive

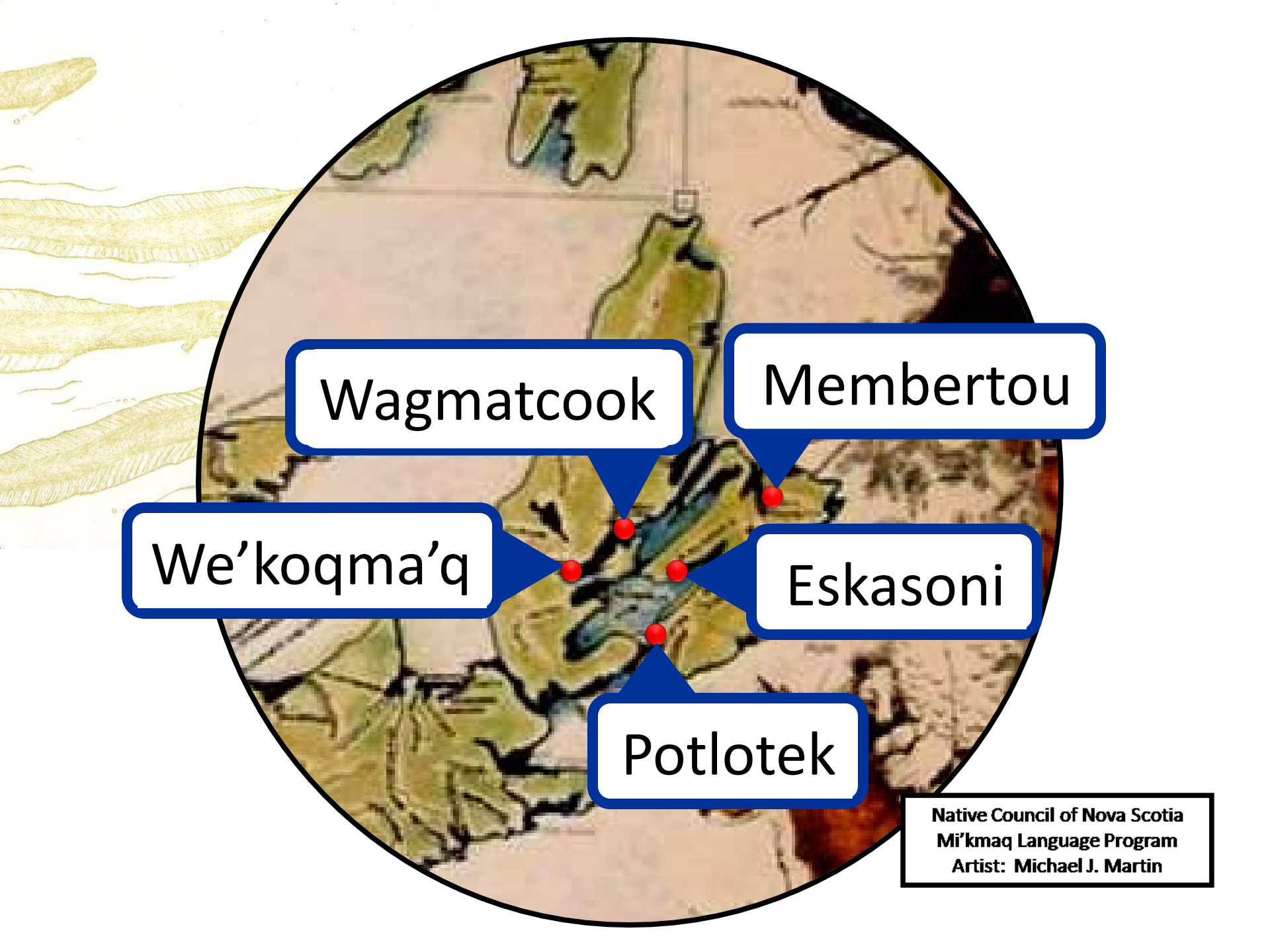


Unama'ki



Eastern Canada

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Artist: Michael J. Martin



Wagmatcook

Membertou

We'koqma'q

Eskasoni

Potlotek

Native Council of Nova Scotia
Mi'kmaq Language Program
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A circular map of the Marshall Islands is shown, with several red dots marking specific locations. Five callout boxes with blue borders and white backgrounds point to these dots, each containing a list of names. The names are: Albert Marshall and Murdena Marshall (top left); Lawrence Wells (top right); Lawrence Bernard (middle left); George Marshall, Stephen Isaac, and anonymous (bottom left); and Camellias Alex, Charlie Sylliboy, Flo Young, George Alex, Lewis Hearney, and Victor Denny (bottom right).

Albert Marshall
Murdena Marshall

Lawrence Wells

Lawrence Bernard

George Marshall
Stephen Isaac
anonymous

Camellias Alex
Charlie Sylliboy
Flo Young
George Alex
Lewis Hearney
Victor Denny



Theme

Observation & Mentorship

Interview & Commentary

Guidance & Advice

Repeated ideas

Singular words or phrases

Repeated words or phrases



Albert Marshall
Mi'kmaq Elder Adv.

Participants
Audio & Transcript

Theme

Respect and reverence for eels as guiding principles in how participants practice eel spearing within traditional way of life.

Participants show respect when:

- harvest eels to fulfill their needs, take a “feed” or a “good feed” and
- use eels with no waste, little waste or “give something back”.

Respect and reverence are based on eels as a source of life.

Respect

I spent my life on eels.

I was always respectful to the eels.

*I always took them home,
made something out of them,
never wasted them.*

[Lawrence Bernard 2008]

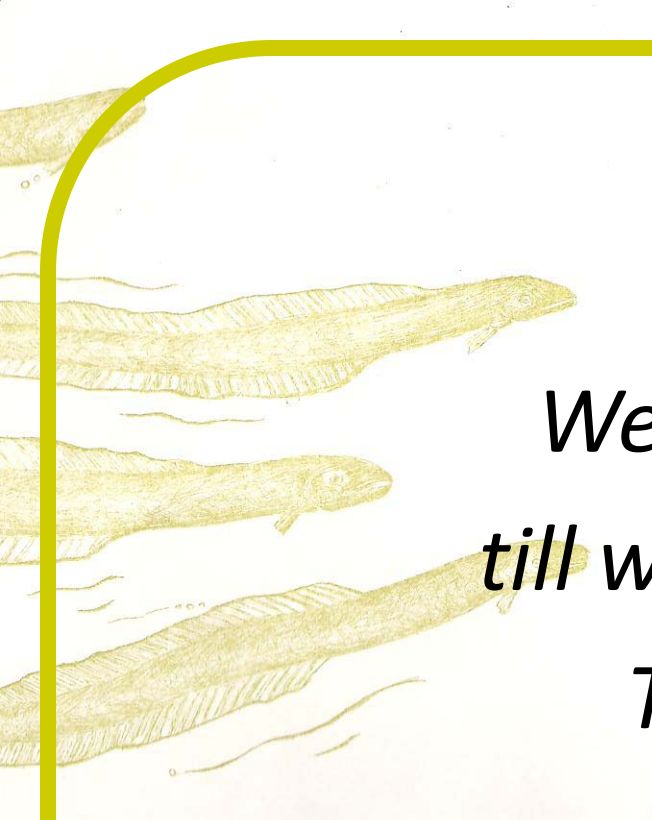
Reverence

SK: When Albert was explaining what you said earlier, he used the word “reverence”. Do you feel comfortable saying a bit more about reverence for nature and eels?

Lewis Hearney: Yeah. It’s the right way to do it, cause if they continue using traps, there will be no eels. For three or four years there, they [the eels] were really scarce. When they stop them, they’re picking up. If they continue to do that, they’ll wipe the eels. It’s better to get some few, not a truckload....Yeah.

AM: Do you get the gist of that [Sana]? When you harvest anything in large quantities, there is no reverence....

A Feed




*Well, we go out there
till we get enough feeds.*

*Then we get out,
we go home,
then we go out again.*

Life was survival....

[Camellias Alex 2008]


A Feed

An illustration of three eels swimming in water, rendered in a light brown, sketchy style. The eels are positioned on the left side of the slide, with their bodies extending towards the center. They are shown in profile, swimming towards the right. The water is indicated by simple, wavy lines.

*We go out for
just enough for a feed.
Two or three dozen [eels].*

[George Alex 2008]

Need



*Me and my husband
we never used to go out to get fish
[eels], more than we need.*

*We get what we need and we go out
and get some more if we need more
tomorrow or next week.*

[Flo Young 2009]

Need

This is a big reserve, but years ago the villages weren't big, they were small, and so every man had an opportunity to do something for the community. For instance, in Membertou, there was this fellow [who] was the one who was most likely to get eels. So he'd leave Membertou, and go to Malagawatch, hop on a train, and get off at Orangedale, and then fish all the next day. When he had a bag ready for the whole community that would feed the community (he'd be fishing all day and all night) then he'd hop on the train and go back to Membertou and then distribute the fish to the elders and the families.

[Murdena Marshall 2009]

Need

We were looking after each other.

Nobody minded sharing food

because there was all kinds of it around.

They, somebody, may come back from eel

fishing and they had all kinds of eels,

they'd have thousands of eels.

[Lawrence Bernard 2008]

A “Feed” & Need

Entire Community

Thousands of Eels

Community

Hundreds of Eels

Family

A Dozen Eels

Self

A Few Eels

No Waste

When I was a little kid, we weren't throwing the guts away. We were fighting for the guts... There was nothing foolish about it. These are done right inside the stove.....

Take whatever part you want of the gut and put a little part on a stick and put them inside the stove. It was nice.

[Lawrence Bernard 2008]

Give Something Back

*And when you take something out of the water
you got to give something back....*

*I take the guts and throw them back out
and let the other fish eat them.*

Fish eat other fish to stay alive.

[George Alex 2008]

No Waste/Giving Back

eat or use entire eel

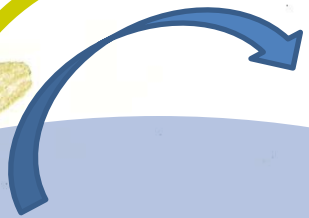
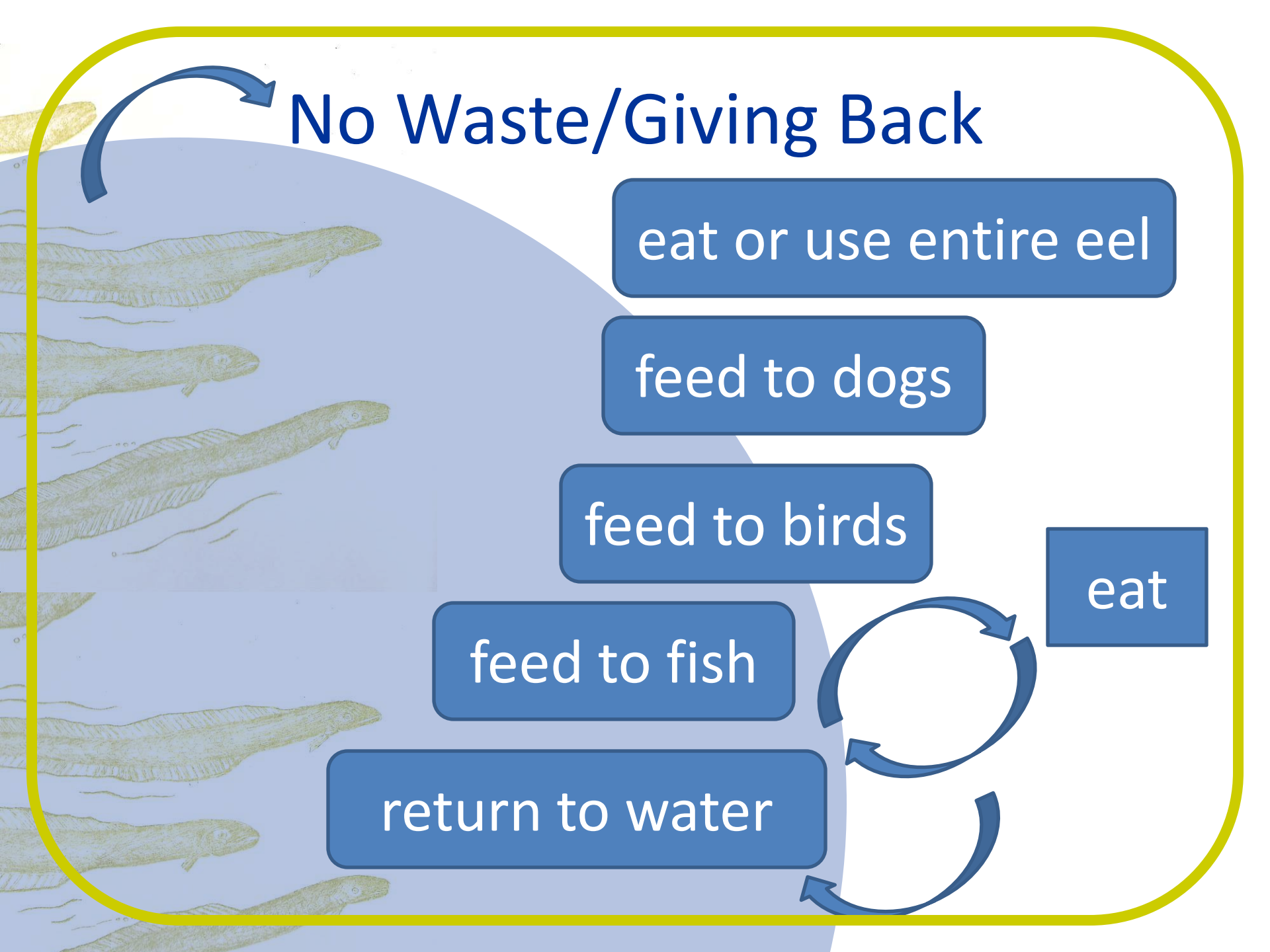
feed to dogs

feed to birds

feed to fish

return to water

eat





Eel Traps

*When you trapping them [the eels],
that's what kills us most,
that's what killed all our eels there.*

About a thousand pounds there.

Alright when you spear them, that's okay.

[Camellias Alex 2009]

The illustration shows three eels swimming in the water, rendered in a light brown, sketchy style. They are positioned on the left side of the slide, with their bodies extending towards the center. The eels are elongated and have visible fins and gills.

A Feed

*We go out for
just enough for a feed.
Two or three dozen [eels],
instead of hauling
two or three thousand pounds.*

[George Alex 2008]



Selective Gear

*When we spear an eel,
We don't take that much...
We get just what we want.*
[Lewis Hearney 2009]

A faint, yellow-toned illustration of several eels swimming horizontally across the left side of the slide. The eels are drawn with fine lines to show scales and fins.

Size Selection

FY: But the way we use the eels we never target the little ones. We used to try looking for the big ones. We let go the little ones. The little ones we don't bother them. Just the big ones, the ones we use them for meals.

SK: Why do you let the little ones go?

FY: Well, they're too small for cooking and anything. It's wasting fish to catch them that small.

[Flo Young 2009]



Size Selection

*You don't go for the small ones,
you let them grow.*

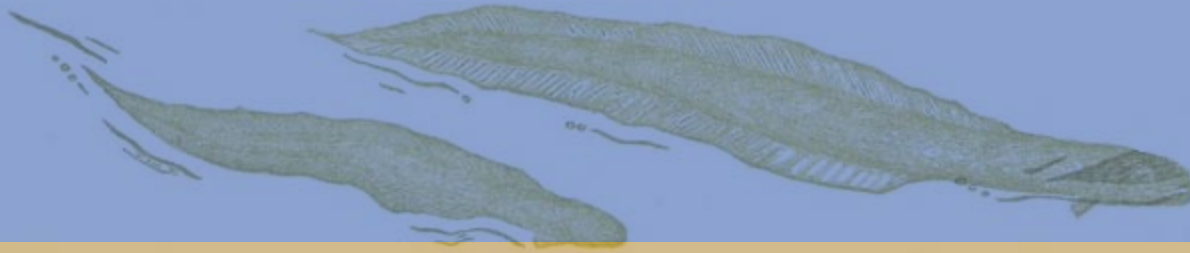
*You go after the big ones, the big eels,
and those ones are good.*

[George Alex 2008]

Size Selection

SUMMER

[George Alex 2008]

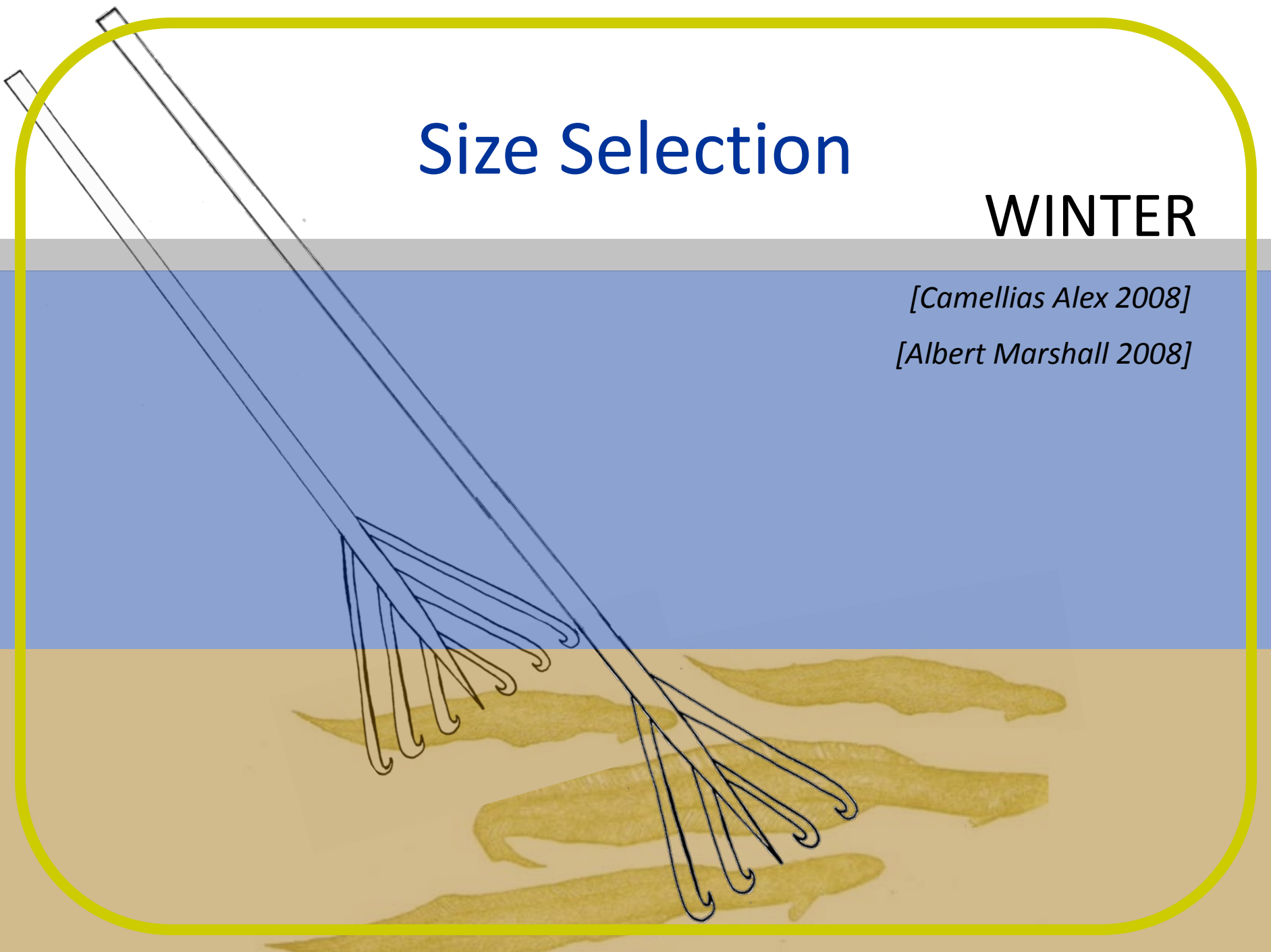


Size Selection

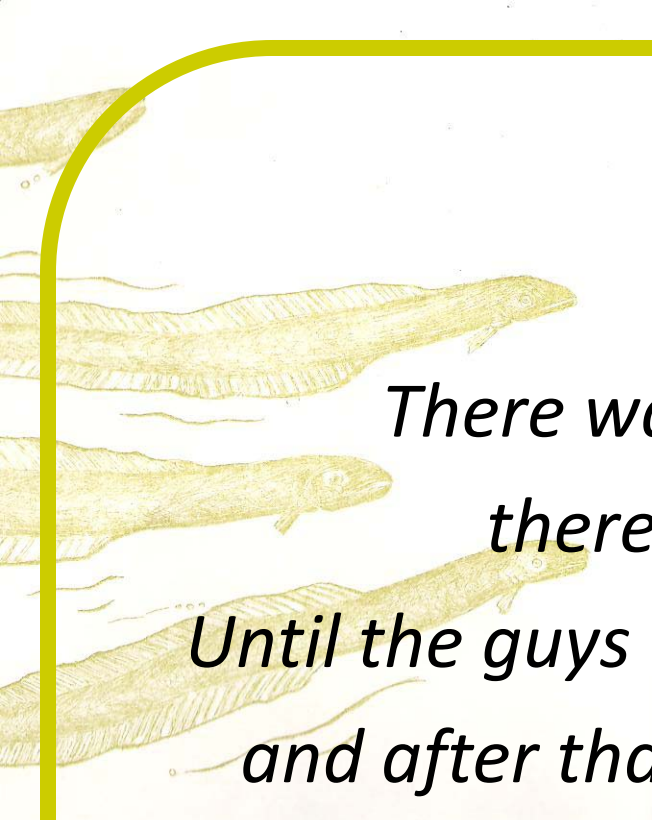
WINTER

[Camellias Alex 2008]

[Albert Marshall 2008]



Elver Fishery



*There was one time in the old days,
there used to be a lot of eels.*

*Until the guys trapped them like this [as elvers],
and after that you hardly got any eels there.*

You didn't get one until three to four years later.

*They're buying them,
they shipped them out somewhere.*

[Camellias Alex 2008]

Waste

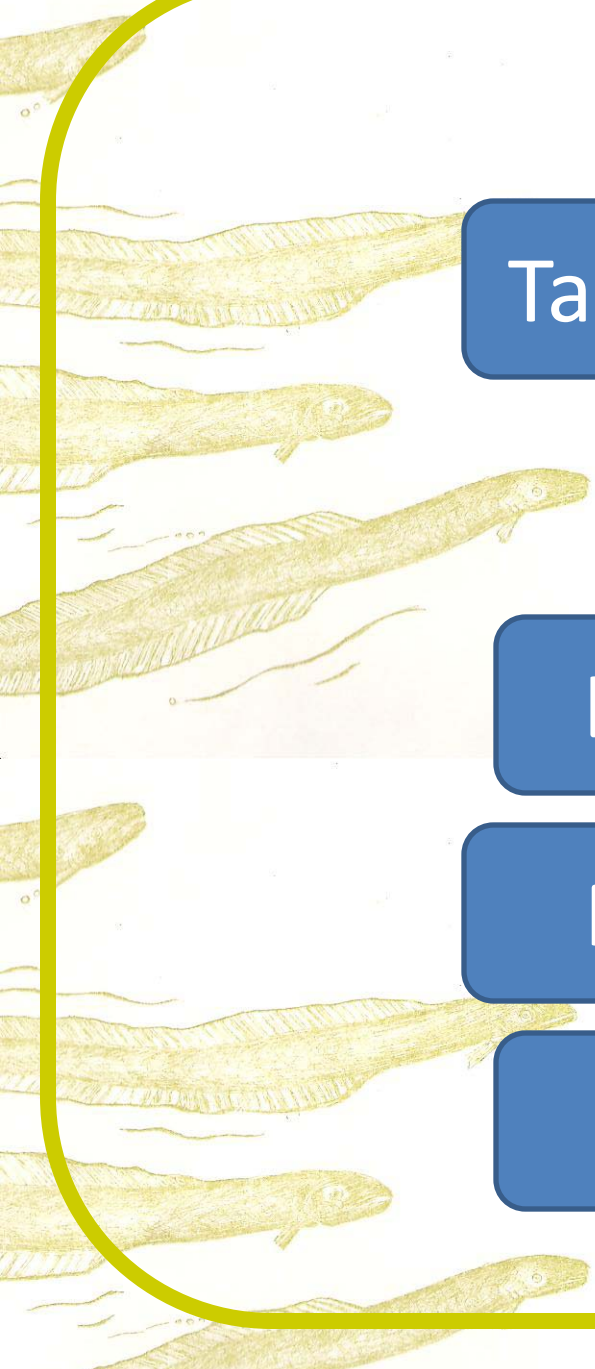
Take more than need or can use

Take too small eel

Let eels spoil before cleaning

Put unused parts in garbage

Put unused parts in woods



Netukulimk

*It's how they manage their sustainability,
how they will survive this day,
and tomorrow, and other days....
I have to do something to sustain my family,
and my neighbors, or my community....
You can't live on fresh air and love,
you know? You need something.*

[Murdena Marshall 2009]

Netukulimk

But they always used that word netukulimk.

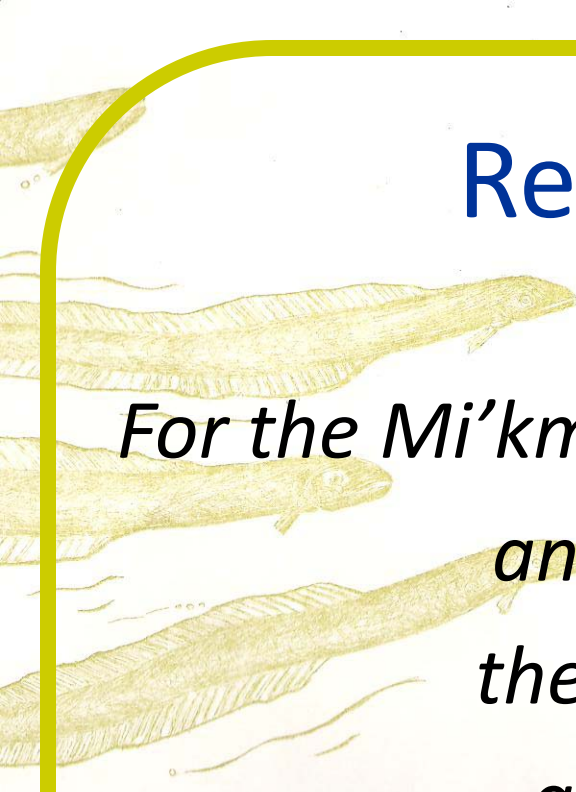
It's so soft that it's not threatening....

You're not out there to kill anybody....

*You'll take what's out there for you,
without threat.*

[Murdena Marshall 2009]

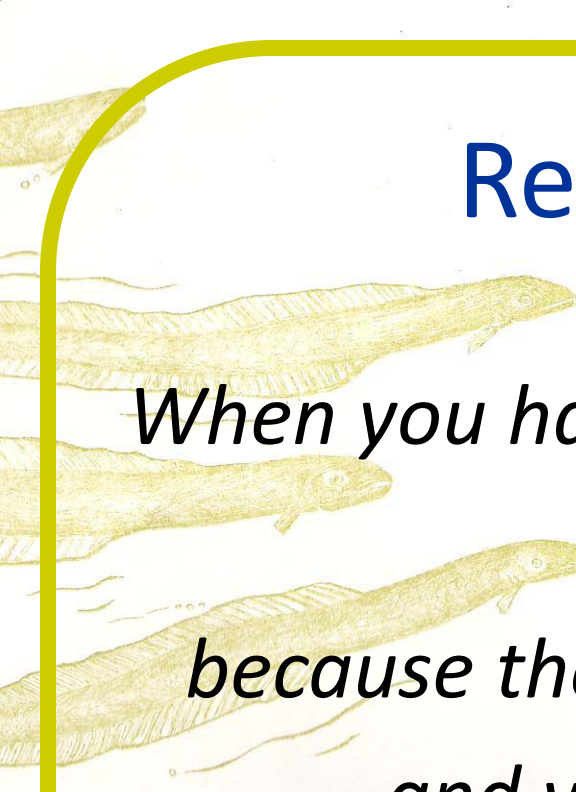
Respect & Reverence



*For the Mi'kmaw person, I only take what I need,
and if I continue doing this,
then I'm showing reverence,
and I'm showing respect,
and I'm demonstrating that eels
will be there for my children,
my grandchildren, and so on.*

[Albert Marshall 2008]

Respect & Reverence



*When you harvest anything in large quantities,
there is no reverence,
because there is no respect for that species,
and you look upon it as its mine,
it's an object,
and I can take as many as I want.*

[Albert Marshall 2008]

Relationship

Our relationship is with that one eel that is coming up there, that's our relationship.

It's going to feed somebody, you know?

And, it's never about catching as many as you can, it's never about... You know, we got a bucket, we got a good feed, it's never about catching as much as you can, I guess.

[George Marshall 2008]

Relationship with Eels

“Eels were life to our people. When everybody was sick and they were down and all that. Medicine. Medicinal purposes with the eels. People would feel a lot better and be able to eat. In the cold, hard winters. I never seen suffering in my life, really. When I grew up in Eskasoni, there was no suffering anywhere. People didn’t have no hard times. We were looking after each other. Nobody minded sharing food because there was all kinds of it around. They, somebody, may come back from eel fishing and they had all kinds of eels, they’d have thousands of eels.”

[Lawrence Bernard 2008]



Kataq mimaju'nuksipni'k.
Eels were life to our people.

[Lawrence Lunj Bernard 2008]

Respect & Reverence

They should use this knowledge that the Elders have, and pass it on to the next generation, so this knowledge will be going forwards, so that every living thing will have this reverence that he has, or that his parents have, or that his grandparents have. Without that connection, people have this tendency to lose, the essence, as eels are not a resource, rather a source of life for the Mi'kmaq for so long.

[Lewis Hearney 2008 & Albert Marshall 2008]



***Eels are not a resource,
rather a source of life
for the Mi'kmaq for so long.***

[Lewis Hearney 2008 & Albert Marshall 2008]

Summary

Respect and reverence for eels as guiding principles in how participants practice eel spearing within traditional way of life

Participants show respect when:

- harvest eels to fulfill their needs, take a “feed” or a “good feed”
- use eels with no waste, little waste or “give something back”

Respect and reverence are based on eels as a source of life.



Special Thanks To Mi'kmaq Providers

- Albert Marshall
- Camellias Alex
- Charles Sylliboy
- Florence Young
- George Alex
- George Marshall
- Lawrence Bernard
- Lawrence Wells
- Lewis Hearney
- Murdena Marshall
- Stephen Isaac
- Anonymous

and participating Mi'kmaq communities of Cape Breton:
Eskasoni, Membertou, Potlotek, We'koqma'q

Special Thanks To

SSHRC



Social Sciences and Humanities
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sciences humaines du Canada

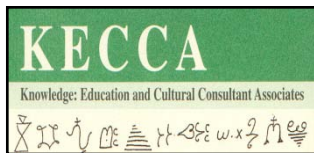
Canada



**Albert
Marshall**
Mi'kmaq Elder,
Eskasoni FN



**Cheryl
Bartlett**
CRC Integrative Science
Professor of Biology



CAPE BRETON
UNIVERSITY

The background of the slide features several detailed, golden-brown illustrations of eels, rendered in a style reminiscent of scientific or historical natural history drawings. The eels are shown in various swimming poses, with their long, slender bodies and characteristic fins clearly visible. The illustrations are set against a light, textured background that looks like aged paper.

Special Thanks To

Artist Basma Kavanagh

Eel Illustrations

Photo polymer plates

Printed using a Vanderbilt Press

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Contact

Sana Kavanagh, graduate student



Institute for Integrative Science and Health,
Cape Breton University
School for Resource and Environmental Studies,
Dalhousie University

Sana_Kavanagh@cbu.ca



Welalin
Thank you
Merci

