

Participants, organizers, mentors, and panelists following the *From Here to There* pre-conference workshop at the 2026 IAGLR & SCAS Joint Conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

From here to there: Bridging people, pathways, and possibilities

By Ruth Duncan, Ella Kinart, Ian Stone, Erin Smith & Navjot Dhaliwhal

Building the workshop

Students and early career researchers (ECRs) often see established researchers and professionals and find themselves asking "how can I get there?" The newly formed IAGLR Student and Early Career (SEC) Committee recognized the need for opportunities to bridge the gap between these two groups, sparking the idea for a pre-conference workshop.

While conferences provide valuable spaces to present research, they can also be intimidating, particularly for those attending for the first time or navigating the many possible career paths within aquatic sciences. Recognizing the success of a previous IAGLR conference workshop led by FishCAST, an NSERC-funded co-curricular training program, the SEC Committee reached out to them to help bring this vision to life at the 2026 joint conference with the Society of Canadian Aquatic Sciences (SCAS) in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Together with the SCAS Student and ECR Engagement Committee, organizers spent four months designing a workshop that would encourage meaningful conversations, mentorship, and community building in an inclusive and welcoming environment. Rather than focusing solely on academic careers, the workshop highlighted the many directions a career in fisheries and aquatic sciences can take, reinforcing that there is no single path to success.

The workshop, *From Here to There: Connecting People and Pathways in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, was held before the conference began to give participants an opportunity to first make connections with fellow students, ECRs, and established professionals. The welcoming space for open conversations helped participants feel safe sharing their experiences, asking honest questions, sharing practical advice, and building professional relationships that continued throughout the week. More than 80 participants registered, demonstrating a clear demand for spaces that foster mentorship, connection, and career development within the aquatic sciences community. With participants representing a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and career stages, the workshop created an environment where learning flowed in every direction, reinforcing the idea that everyone has something to teach and something to learn.

The workshop experience

The workshop's interactive design encouraged participants to engage with one another rather than simply listen to presentations. The afternoon began with Ruth Duncan, Anishinaabe Kwe and Trent University graduate student, grounding participants by sharing a water song and offering tobacco. This was followed by A "Privilege for Sale" activity,

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which prompted participants to reflect on the different experiences and opportunities that shape individual career journeys. By acknowledging that not everyone begins from the same starting point, the activity helped establish an environment where openness, empathy, and honest conversations could flourish throughout the day.

Building on this foundation, the workshop featured a diverse panel representing careers across academia, government, consulting, non-profit organizations, and community-based research. Panelists reflected on the realities of their own career journeys, discussing how their paths evolved in unexpected ways, the skills they found most valuable, and the advice they would offer to students and ECRs entering the field today. Rather than presenting a single roadmap to success, the discussion highlighted that careers in fisheries and aquatic sciences are rarely linear, and that flexibility, curiosity, and meaningful relationships often shape opportunities as much as technical expertise.

One theme surfaced repeatedly throughout the discussions: there is no single "right" career path. Every panelist arrived where they are today through a unique combination of opportunities, challenges, detours, and relationships.

The afternoon concluded with small-group discussions where participants explored topics including navigating career pathways, developing professional skills, building networking strategies, and transitioning into the workforce. These conversations provided opportunities to ask candid questions, exchange experiences, and build relationships in a more informal setting. For many participants, the workshop served not only as a chance to learn from established professionals, but also to connect with peers facing similar questions and challenges. By the time the conference officially began the following morning, many attendees had already formed new friendships, identified potential collaborators, and developed a stronger sense of belonging within IAGLR, SCAS, and broader aquatic science community.

Looking Ahead

The impact of *From Here to There* continued throughout the week as participants carried new connections and perspectives into conference sessions, poster presentations, and social events. Conversations sparked during the workshop extended well beyond the scheduled program, including discussions around developing a collaborative manuscript to capture the ideas, experiences, and perspectives shared throughout the afternoon.

For the nascent IAGLR SEC Committee, the workshop marked an exciting milestone as its first major initiative. Overwhelming interest in the workshop highlighted a strong appetite for opportunities that foster mentorship, professional development, and meaningful connection within the IAGLR community. The success of this collaborative effort has inspired the SEC Committee to set a new goal of establishing a mentorship program to expand future opportunities for students and ECRs.

None of this would have been possible without the collaboration and enthusiasm of FishCAST, the SCAS Student and ECR Engagement Committee, our panelists, mentors, volunteers, and every participant who contributed their experiences and perspectives. The workshop demonstrated that a strong scientific community requires just that: community. This means going beyond merely sharing research. Instead, we need to build bridges and create spaces where people feel welcomed, supported, and inspired by one another.

As the aquatic sciences community continues to grow, we hope *From Here to There* becomes a lasting pre-conference tradition, bringing together current and future generations of researchers, practitioners, and leaders to share stories, build connections, and support one another as they navigate their own careers. After all, every career journey begins with a new connection, and sometimes, getting from here to there starts with simply sitting down at the same table.

The authors are members of the IAGLR Student and Early Career Committee. Ruth Duncan and Ella Kinart are students in the Environmental & Life Sciences Graduate Program at Trent University. Ian Stone is collaborative research specialist with the University of Michigan Graham Sustainability Institute's Water Center. Erin Smith is a post-doctoral researcher at the River Institute. Navjot Dhaliwhal is a Ph.D. candidate at York University.