

Prince Rupert Public Forum Summaries

Date: September 1, 2010
Time: 6:40 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. (approximately)
Venue: North Coast Meeting and Convention Centre (Orca Room)
Presentations: 15

Welcome

Chief Alec Campbell welcomed the Commissioner to the traditional territory of the Tsimshian Nation. He identified the Tsimshian chiefs and matriarchs in attendance, and emphasized to the Commissioner that the Tsimshian bands stood in unison on the matter at hand.

Clarence Nelson

Clarence Nelson identified himself as a member of the Metlakatla First Nation. He recognized the chiefs and hereditary members of the Tsimshian Nation in attendance, and thanked the Commissioner for the opportunity to speak. Mr. Nelson described the importance of the salmon fishery to the Tsimshian people. He illustrated the migratory path of Fraser sockeye, noting traditional Tsimshian fishing areas such as Dixon Entrance. He also recounted his personal fishing history, which he said included working in the commercial fishery in the Johnstone Strait and off the Queen Charlotte Islands. Mr. Nelson said that DFO's policies of area fishing and quotas have denied the Tsimshian access to the Fraser sockeye return. He argued that over-escapement damages spawning grounds, and encouraged the Commissioner to investigate DFO's management practices. He also urged the Commissioner to consider the economic impact of the decline of Fraser sockeye, which he said has caused economic hardship for his community.

Stan Denis

Stan Denis explained that he was speaking on behalf of his tribe, which belongs to the Lax-kw'alaams community. He outlined his background as a fisherman, and argued that the implementation of area fishing has disrupted his people's ability to fish. Regarding the 2010 Fraser sockeye return, he said that DFO mismanaged fishery openings in the North by permitting fishing only in Area 3-7, despite an abundance of Fraser sockeye in Areas 4 and 5. He recommended that sport fishers be monitored more closely and, like gillnetters, be required to fish in certain areas. Mr. Dennis discussed the economic impact of the downturn in the commercial fishery, explaining that businesses in Port Edward, Prince Rupert, and Terrace have suffered since trolling licences were revoked. He expressed frustration at what he described as the inability of his community to fish for sufficient salmon. He concluded by calling for fishery closures on the Skeena River, Dundas Island, and surrounding islands and tributaries to ensure the survival of nearby First Nations communities, which he said depend heavily on salmon.

Stan Denis Jr. (Councillor, Lax-kw'alaams and Member, Lax-kw'alaams Fisheries Committee)

Stan Dennis Jr. said that northern First Nations are in disarray because of what is occurring in the regional salmon fishery. He warned that First Nations may undertake disciplinary action should the total

allowable catch for northern fisheries continue to shrink despite increasing allocations for the southern fishery and sport fishers. He emphasized the need to improve relations between the various sectors of the fishery, and between DFO and First Nations. He addressed the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines Project, arguing that it will have a negative impact on salmon populations in the area. He concluded by urging the Commissioner to consider the unique conditions of the northern fishery, which he said is facing different challenges than the southern fishery.

Jack Mussallem (Mayor of Prince Rupert)

Jack Mussallem reminded the Commissioner that what is occurring on the Fraser River could happen on other sockeye-bearing rivers in British Columbia. He said that the fishery's boom and bust cycles create inconsistency and erode sustainability for fishing companies, their workers, and associated businesses, and that there are severe economic impacts when Fraser sockeye cannot be harvested. Mayor Mussallem suggested that DFO may need to break away from regional fishery licensing to permit fishers to harvest sufficient fish, which he said would also assist businesses and communities that rely on fishers. Mayor Mussallem said that further efforts are needed to assist the Fraser sockeye fishery to become sustainable, including increasing habitat and allowing ocean ranching. He concluded by emphasizing that in order to be sustainable, the Fraser sockeye fishery requires a stabilization program to ensure consistent returns.

Linda Hawkshaw (Speaking on behalf of Fred Hawkshaw, who was absent)

Linda Hawkshaw informed the Commissioner that the northern fishery was very poor in 2010, lasting only seven days. She said that salmon populations in the Fraser and Skeena rivers are in decline because they are intercepted by Alaskan fishers, and that the strength of the 2010 Fraser sockeye return was due to a ban on commercial fishing at Alaska's Noyes Island.

Mabel Mazurek (General Manager, Northern Native Fishing Corporation)

Mabel Mazurek introduced the Northern Native Fishing Corporation, which she says owns 254 commercial gillnet licences and supports Aboriginal fishers. She explained that her presentation was a response to the question, 'How can citizens participate in the recovery of Fraser sockeye?' Ms. Mazurek called for the establishment of a voluntary commercial licence tie-up program, similar to the Pacific Vessel Tie-Up Program launched by DFO in 1998. She emphasized that such a program would assist fishers to offset costs while furthering DFO fish conservation efforts. In addition, she said that it would provide stabilization and maintain infrastructure through boom and bust cycles and protect new entrants to the industry.

Gary Coons (MLA North Coast)

Gary Coons said that the large difference between the 2009 and 2010 Fraser sockeye returns illustrates the need for a strategic provincial plan to ensure the sustainability of coastal communities. He explained that DFO must implement a management system that can accurately forecast annual salmon returns, and pointed to a lack of sufficient baseline research, mismanagement, and excessive centralization as DFO shortcomings that the commission should investigate. On the issue of research, Mr. Coons cited the proceedings of the March 2010 Summit on Fraser River Sockeye, which call for

additional research to address critical knowledge gaps around Fraser River sockeye. He also discussed the Wild Salmon Policy, and noted his concern that there is no mention of the policy in the commission's documentation or Terms of Reference. Mr. Coons said that he agrees with Dr. Carl Walters that DFO should move away from the fixed escapement policy, and that it should consider the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's salmon management model. He concluded by calling for the establishment of an integrated and cohesive strategic plan that would address the challenges facing the fisheries and contribute to the sustainability of marine communities.

Joy Thorkelson (Northern Representative, United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union)

Joy Thorkelson presented on DFO's escapement policy, which she argued has failed to improve salmon returns and is among the reasons why Canadian salmon returns are doing poorly compared to those of Alaska. She said that the escapement policy leads to over-spawning, which, according to data from the Babine spawning channel, causes disease. Ms. Thorkelson displayed several graphs illustrating marine exploitation rates, marine harvest percentages, and escapement sizes and subsequent return sizes. She said that the charts show that reduced marine exploitation rates and increased escapement sizes do not lead to higher salmon returns, which she said is proof of the policy's ineffectiveness. She called on the Commissioner to investigate why DFO continues to enforce the policy despite its lack of results and its negative economic effect on the commercial fishery.

Dr. Cristina Soto (Biologist, North Coast-Skeena First Nations Stewardship Society)

Dr. Cristina Soto responded to three of the questions posed by the commission: 'What is your vision for the sustainability of Fraser sockeye?', 'What is required to secure the future of Fraser sockeye?', and 'What are the major habitat issues for Fraser sockeye and how can these be mitigated?' On the first question, Dr. Soto called on the commission to investigate human sustainability in addition to salmon sustainability, and argued that a lack of inclusiveness exists around DFO's management decisions and consultation with First Nations. She recommended that an assessment of the social, economic, and biological consequences of salmon fisheries be included in salmon management practices. On the second question, Dr. Soto emphasized the need for improved science around stock assessment and marine survival issues, increased monitoring and enforcement, and an open discussion about the effect of hatcheries. Dr. Soto concluded her presentation by addressing the third question, describing climate change as one of the major habitat issues for Fraser sockeye.

Des Nobels

Des Nobels introduced himself and acknowledged the Tsimshian territory on which the forum was being held. He explained that he worked as a commercial fisher for 27 years and is now employed by the T. Buck Suzuki Foundation. Mr. Nobels said that DFO's management capacity, its ability to conduct science, and the autonomy of its regional offices has eroded since the 1980s, which he argued has reduced DFO's capacity to accurately predict salmon returns. He described Canadian fisheries management as having become too centralized, politicized, and privatized, and called on the Commissioner to address the lack of initiatives carried out under the Wild Salmon Policy. Mr. Nobels pointed to the Sustainable Marine Fisheries and Communities Alliance, established recently in northern British Columbia, as a model for the Fraser fishery to follow. In addition, he urged the Commissioner to

recommend that funding for DFO be reinstated to pre-1995 levels, that DFO decision-making be returned to DFO offices, and that political interference be eliminated from fisheries management. In closing, Mr. Nobels said that what is happening in the Fraser River is indicative of what is occurring elsewhere on the Pacific coast.

Lothar Schiese

Lothar Schiese said that existing fisheries management policies do not reflect the needs of the majority of Canadians. He argued that volunteer fish counting programs and spawning stream expansion efforts are valuable tools for increasing salmon stocks. He informed the Commissioner that DFO has refused to look at stream enhancement data from a volunteer in the Terrace area, and noted his disbelief that First Nations are arrested for what he described as food fishing. Mr. Schiese urged the Commissioner to read the book *Darwin's Ghost*, and called on the Commissioner to recommend funding for salmon enhancement programs and scientific studies by academics throughout British Columbia. He also suggested that the Commissioner consider increased carbon dioxide levels and the El Niño effect as potential causes of the decline of Fraser sockeye.

Randy Rifold

Randy Rifold called on the Commissioner to recommend the resumption of test boat programs in Area B. He said that the lack of test boats prevents commercial fishers from knowing the timing and size of each year's salmon return. He noted that the computer models designed to replace test boats (which he said operated from 1965 to 1979 on the west coast of Vancouver Island, off Haida Gwaii, in the Strait of Georgia and near Noyes Island) are based on outdated data and are largely ineffective. Mr. Rifold emphasized that the decline of test boat programs has reduced the efficiency and profitability of the commercial fishery and in part caused the high unemployment among fishers.

Paul Pearson

Paul Pearson discussed his personal history and his experiences in the fishing and logging industries. He emphasized that 2010 was the first time in nearly thirty years that salmon have returned to the streams near his home. He blamed the decline on pollution from cruise ships plying the Hecate Strait, sea lice from fish farms, and the growth of jellyfish populations in the ocean. He said that DFO has ignored traditional First Nations methods for predicting salmon returns, and that it depends too heavily on science. He also argued that there are too few fisheries officers in Rennell Sound to monitor sport fishers. Mr. Pearson concluded by calling for an investigation into the fishery in northern British Columbia, which he said is experiencing issues similar to those on the Fraser River.

Bill White

Bill White called on the Commissioner to recommend that DFO launch an investigation into the Skeena and Nass fisheries. He compared shore workers to an endangered species, and said that they deserved compensation for the lack of work at fish processing plants. Citing an increase in forest fires over the past several years, Mr. White suggested that fire retardants may be contributing to the decline of Fraser sockeye. He concluded by emphasizing the need for the Commissioner to consider not only Fraser sockeye, but the people who depend on them as well.

Chief Alec Campbell (Tsimshian Nation)

Chief Alec Campbell discussed the history of the region's fishing industry. He argued that new DFO policies have reduced the time permitted for fishing, which he said has caused unemployment and impacted the ability of First Nations to catch sufficient fish. He criticized DFO's management of the fisheries and called its quota policy misguided. Chief Campbell responded to accusations that First Nations are overfishing, noting that First Nations lack the fishing capacity to have caused the decline of salmon populations in British Columbia. He said that First Nations have extensive knowledge about salmon and their habitat, and called on the Commissioner to recommend that they be given an expanded role in managing Canada's Pacific fisheries.