

Victoria Public Forum Summaries

Date: September 16, 2010
Time: 6:30 p.m. – 9:15 p.m. (approximately)
Venue: Hotel Grand Pacific (Vancouver Island Room)
Presentations: 13

Welcome

Elder Bob welcomed the commission to the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt nations. He explained that he belongs to the Cowichan tribe of the Coast Salish people, a people whose territory stretches south into the United States and who consider salmon to be sacred.

Chris Marks

Chris Marks presented on the impact of open net-pen aquaculture on Fraser sockeye. He argued that credible science shows a connection between open net-pen aquaculture and the decline of wild salmon stocks, and called on DFO to apply the precautionary principle and mandate that fish farms be moved to closed containment systems. Mr. Marks noted that open net-pen farms are located in areas of high tidal activity, which he said makes it difficult to study the precise impact of pathogens and disease on wild stocks. He called on the Commissioner to recommend that disease reporting by aquaculture corporations be made mandatory. He referenced a recent article in *Virology Journal* that traces the transmission of the ISA virus from Europe to South America. Mr. Marks argued that these findings contradict statements by DFO that the virus does not travel in eggs, and emphasized that it is imperative for the commission to thoroughly investigate the aquaculture industry to ensure the public has a balanced understanding of its risks to wild salmon.

Eric Hobson (President, SOS Marine Conservation Foundation)

Eric Hobson responded to the second question posed by the commission: 'What is required to secure the future of Fraser sockeye?' He explained that ending the potential for the transmission of disease and parasites from open net-cage fish farms offers the most immediate opportunity for restoring wild stocks. Mr. Hobson introduced the SOS Marine Conservation Foundation, which he said works collaboratively with government and the aquaculture industry in three areas: improving fish farm practices, developing a transparent and accountable regulatory regime, and facilitating the development and adoption of land-based aquaculture technology. Mr. Hobson described the foundation's specific activities and accomplishments in each area. He concluded by emphasizing that through its efforts, the foundation hopes to restore public confidence in the aquaculture industry and ensure that priority is properly placed on wild salmon.

Barbara Watson

Barbara Watson described the impact of open net-pen aquaculture and seine fishing techniques on Fraser sockeye. She argued that aquaculture operators refuse to release disease information, and that fish farms threaten the destruction of wild stocks through feed and disease issues. Regarding the

strength of the 2010 return, Ms. Watson speculated that as fry, the salmon may have migrated south around Vancouver Island rather than north, thereby avoiding contact with fish farms. On the topic of seine fishing, Ms. Watson argued that the introduction of large seine boats displaced jobs and caused economic hardship for fishing communities. She emphasized that the aquaculture industry, which she said violates marine law, has done little to replace these jobs as most of its profits are funnelled to foreign corporations. Ms. Watson said that her vision for the sustainability of Fraser sockeye includes a return to fisheries policies that support smaller fishing boats, as well as the adoption of land-based aquaculture, which she said would provide both jobs and a sustainable source of fish protein. Ms. Watson concluded by calling for a return to common sense policies that abide by the marine laws of Canada and protect ocean waters.

Calvin Sandborn (University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre)

Calvin Sandborn introduced a video prepared by the University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre about the problem of storm water runoff in the Capital Regional District. The video featured interviews with various experts and outlined how storm water, which picks up toxic chemicals as it sweeps over urban areas, is conveyed into sensitive water bodies at high speed and volume, killing salmon and destroying their habitat. The video described how outdated municipal infrastructure permits storm water to mix with sewage and leak into the ocean and other sensitive water bodies. The video also offered solutions for effective storm water management. It emphasized the need for a regional storm water management plan, especially in the Central Regional District, that considers the dynamics of the entire watershed. It referenced the restoration of Bowker Creek, which recently saw the return of Coho salmon, as an example of how an integrated approach to storm water management, combined with political energy, can mitigate the impact of storm water on salmon habitat.

Paddy O'Reilly (University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre and Veins of Life Watershed Society)

Paddy O'Reilly concluded the University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre's presentation. She emphasized that urban storm water problems throughout the Fraser River basin must be addressed to preserve sockeye salmon. She provided context for the development of British Columbia's storm water problems, noting that outdated storm water management devastated salmon habitat and caused, in part, the decline of Georgia Strait Coho runs. Ms. O'Reilly said that new storm water systems that work in harmony with natural water cycles are necessary to address these problems. She offered examples of several inexpensive, low impact development techniques, such as installing sidewalk planter boxes and rain gardens, that reduce the amount of storm water flowing into salmon streams. She pointed to Philadelphia and Washington State as examples of jurisdictions that have successfully implemented such practices, and called on British Columbia to follow suit by implementing the recommendations of *Re-inventing Rainwater Management*, a report by the University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre. Ms. O'Reilly concluded that implementing green methods of managing rainwater is essential to ensuring the sustainability of Fraser sockeye.

Vicky Husband

Vicky Husband welcomed the Commissioner to Victoria and presented him with a copy of *Dead Reckoning* by Terry Glavin. She discussed the importance of salmon to British Columbia, emphasizing the

need for political will and public action to address their decline. She recommended that conservation be made the highest priority for fisheries managers, and an unwavering commitment be made to the Wild Salmon Policy and the precautionary principle. She suggested removing the current over-reliance on non-selective mixed-stock fisheries, and that government enshrine its commitment under the *Fisheries Act* to protect fish habitat. She called on the federal government to take concrete action on climate change by upholding the Kyoto Protocol and its targets, and committing to a scientific and strategic justification of its Salmon Enhancement Program, which she said remains a poorly-mitigated threat to diversity. She recommended that the federal government reform fisheries management and culture and work on reconciliation with First Nations over Aboriginal fishing rights. Ms. Husband also addressed the issue of over-spawning, arguing that it has been refuted as a cause of stock collapse by numerous studies, including the 2002 report by the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council. She concluded by emphasizing the need for collective action to address the various challenges facing Fraser sockeye, and for the need to protect salmon diversity.

Jim Mclsaac (T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation)

Jim Mclsaac presented on stock assessment projects, sockeye predators, the implications of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and the need for a new management framework. Mr. Mclsaac described the difficulty of performing accurate stock assessments, noting that DFO lacks data about the distribution and population of most of the 403 known fish species on the Pacific coast. He discussed the complexity of the marine food web and the growth of Humboldt Squid and other predator populations since the 1970s, noting that it may be necessary to cull some predators in order to preserve the commercial fishery. Mr. Mclsaac also addressed the relationship between the Canadian and U.S. commercial fisheries, suggesting that strong north-westerly winds in 2010 prevented the U.S. fleet from harvesting Fraser sockeye. He said that the Pacific Salmon Treaty has not provided British Columbian fishers with an equitable harvesting share, and called on Canada to adopt a tougher stance when negotiating with the U.S. He asked the Commissioner to investigate discrepancies in DFO's estimates of the 2010 return, and urged that DFO be mandated to serve primarily as a science and enforcement tool and that the *Fisheries Act* be amended to include a Minister's Advisory Council. He outlined his vision of a sustainable Fraser sockeye fishery, which includes healthy sockeye populations and thriving coastal communities.

Daniel Lousier (Social Ecology Institute of British Columbia)

Daniel Lousier described his personal and professional history. He emphasized the importance of salmon to British Columbia and described his disappointment with media coverage of the 2010 Fraser sockeye return, reminding the Commissioner that much remains unknown about the sockeye life cycle. He said that his vision for the sustainability of Fraser sockeye involves healthy, breeding populations of all genetic variants of Fraser sockeye. He outlined 12 areas where knowledge and awareness of sockeye activity is limited and where further information is required. He called for federal and provincial funding for research into these areas, and for the establishment of a salmonid research institute. Mr. Lousier also identified nine habitat concerns caused by industrial activities, agriculture, urbanization, and climate change. He concluded by emphasizing the need to reconsider the concept of sustainability, and to re-establish humanity's connection with the natural world.

Chief Harold Sewid (Mamalilikulla-Qwe'Qwa'Sot'Em)

Chief Harold Sewid thanked the Songhees people for permitting him to speak on their territory. He explained the origin of his name and his background as a commercial seine fisher. He said that his grandfather taught him that salmon are integral to the health of the environment. Chief Sewid pointed to predation by seals, as well as sea lions, squid, Coho salmon, and Pacific White-Sided dolphins, as a potential cause of the decline of Fraser sockeye, noting that First Nations historically culled seals to protect salmon runs. He also identified over-spawning, as well as pollution and IHN outbreaks triggered by warm water, as issues the Commissioner should investigate. He emphasized the need for balance in the ecosystem. He said that he is thankful for the arrival of aquaculture, which he said faces the same environmental challenges as other coastal industries, including logging, mining, and commercial fishing. Chief Sewid emphasized that the Commissioner has a unique opportunity to ensure the survival of Fraser sockeye.

Holly Arntzen (President, Artist Response Team Inc.)

Holly Arntzen addressed the question: 'What can citizens do to ensure the sustainability of Fraser sockeye?' In her response, she offered four recommendations for citizens: Become ecologically literate; place a high value on wild salmon; work together with all Fraser River basin communities to restore habitat, engage the political process, and demand sustainable policies; and engage cultural tools – music, environmental education, and concerns – to drive a shift in culture. Ms. Arntzen described the purpose of the Artist Response Team (ART), an organization dedicated to addressing environmental issues peacefully through music. Ms. Arntzen explained that ART attempts to improve the public's ecological literacy in order to affect a cultural shift towards placing a higher value on nature. She emphasized that music can be a tool for achieving collaboration on controversial issues, such as the decline of Fraser sockeye. As an example, she sang the song "Fish and Trees" for the Commissioner. Ms. Arntzen ended her presentation by requesting that the aquaculture industry release its data related to disease outbreaks on fish farms.

Rob Fleming (MLA Victoria-Swan Lake)

Rob Fleming presented on the need for clarity around British Columbia's role in co-managing the fisheries. He discussed the provincial government's decision not to appeal Justice Hinkson's ruling in *Morton v. British Columbia (Agriculture and Lands)*, noting that it would be difficult to imagine an Atlantic province willingly relinquishing jurisdiction over aquaculture to the federal government. Mr. Fleming said that negotiations between the federal and provincial governments have been conducted without transparency or an adequate regard for the timeline of the Cohen Commission. He accused the provincial government of reducing the Ministry of Environment's regulatory capacity by cutting its budget. He called on the provincial government to implement an ecosystem-based management approach as outlined in the final report of the Pacific Salmon Forum, and argued that adopting closed containment methods would mitigate the negative impacts of fish farms on wild stocks. He also voiced his opposition to what he described as attempts to weaken the *Fisheries Act* and environmental assessment processes. Mr. Fleming said that he is hopeful that the Commissioner's recommendations will help resolve the decline of Fraser sockeye.

Jack Etkin

Jack Etkin presented on the relationship between democracy and the decline of Fraser sockeye. He suggested that the loss of wild salmon stocks is a symptom of a larger environmental disaster caused by the ongoing destruction of the planet by corporations that are unaccountable to the public. He argued that this destruction is sanctioned by the federal and provincial governments, both of which he said have become undemocratic. Mr. Etkin criticized the media for being complicit in this process, saying for example that local media failed to adequately publicize the commission's Victoria public forum. Mr. Etkin said that re-establishing democratic governance in Canada is a necessary step in addressing environmental problems, including the decline of Fraser sockeye.

Rollie Rose

Rollie Rose discussed the need for accurate counts of the number of fish caught by each sector of the fishery. He explained that in some sectors, counts are poor estimates at best. He described a recent encounter with a seine fisher who failed to accurately report his catch of pilchards. Mr. Rose urged the Commissioner to recommend that it be mandatory for all fishers to accurately report their catch, and to further recommend stiff penalties for those who fail to do so.