

Chilliwack Public Forum Summaries

Date: September 29, 2010
Time: 6:05 p.m. – 8:15 p.m. (approximately)
Venue: Coast Chilliwack Hotel (Rosedale AB)
Presentations: 11

Welcome

June Quipp of the Cheam First Nation welcomed the Commissioner to Chilliwack. She stressed the importance of the salmon fishery to the Cheam people. She compared the 2009 Fraser sockeye return to the 2010 return, explaining that this year her smokehouse is full of salmon. She reminded the Commissioner of the eagle feather presented to him at his Cheam Beach site visit, explaining that it represents the importance of speaking the truth. She expressed her dissatisfaction over DFO's decision to close the 2010 fishery, noting that many Cheam have not yet reached their sustenance requirements. Ms. Quipp said that the Cheam are concerned about the impact of fish farming on wild stocks. She concluded by introducing Justin Pettis and Bill Davies, who performed a song of welcome for the Commissioner.

Glen Thompson (Friends of the Chilliwack River Valley)

Glen Thompson presented on federal and provincial fisheries management. He argued that, unlike the banking industry, salmon lack a central regulatory body and are poorly managed. He said that the federal and provincial governments employ a reactionary management strategy, which he said is ineffective for mitigating threats. He referenced the presentation by Michael Barkusky at the New Westminster public forum, noting that he agrees with Mr. Barkusky's differentiation between the economic principles of 'inventory' and 'natural asset'. Mr. Thompson emphasized that other species, such as bald eagles and Atlantic cod, experienced declines because they lacked a single regulator and were subject to interference by too many stakeholders. He also addressed claims that the decline of Fraser sockeye may be due to overfishing by First Nations, arguing that the commercial fishery does far more damage than First Nations fishers. Mr. Thompson said that gravel mining and 'green zones', which he described as areas where the provincial government permits unregulated open pit mining, threaten salmon habitat. He called on the Commissioner to thoroughly investigate DFO management and to recommend that DFO be empowered to make effective regulations.

Donald Costin

Donald Costin, a retired farmer and DFO employee, offered his views on potential causes of the decline of Fraser sockeye. He expressed dissatisfaction that despite the talents of DFO staff, Fraser sockeye continue to suffer from what he described as poor management. Mr. Costin argued that humans depend on environmental diversity, and that the recent fluctuation in sockeye returns illustrates the need to improve prediction methods. He urged the Commissioner to investigate several factors that he said may be negatively affecting Fraser sockeye, including insecticide, raw sewage and pulp mill effluent, genetically modified organisms, fertilizers, waste from cruise and cargo ships, acid rain, raw gas and oil

from recreational vessels, and predation. He concluded by emphasizing the need for further research and data on humanity's overall effect on the environment.

Tim Tyler

Tim Tyler presented on salmon enhancement efforts on Coquitlam River, DFO management, and private prosecutions under the *Fisheries Act*. He recommended that the enforcement and prosecution arm of DFO be made an independent organization insulated from political interference. He also called on the Commissioner to recommend that private prosecutions under the *Fisheries Act* be encouraged and that a legislative formula be enacted to prevent the federal or provincial governments from arbitrarily staying or assuming such prosecutions. Mr. Tyler criticized DFO management for ignoring what he described as the obvious threat posed by fish farms to wild salmon stocks. He argued that DFO refuses to prosecute individuals who dump deleterious substances into the Coquitlam River, despite the presence of conclusive evidence. He said that SLAPP suits (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) discourage the public from advocating for fish and fish habitat, and urged the Commissioner to encourage private prosecutions under the *Fisheries Act*, which he said would assist in the restoration of Fraser sockeye.

Gwen O'Mahoney

Gwen O'Mahoney discussed her attempts to gather information in order to address community concerns about the Aggregate Pilot Project proposed for the Fraser Valley Regional District. Ms. O'Mahoney described the approval process in place as inadequate. She said that she received slow, delayed or no responses to her correspondence, as did organizations such as the Friends of the Chilliwack River Valley. She explained that questions were not adequately answered, nor were decisions clearly defended. Ms. O'Mahoney said that the individuals she dealt with were more concerned with legislation than with site-specific concerns. She concluded by recommending that the Commissioner encourage DFO to establish stronger partnerships with First Nations, non-profit organizations, and community advocates.

Elena Edwards

Elena Edwards outlined what she believes is necessary to ensure a healthy future for Fraser sockeye. She encouraged the Commissioner to consider how industrial activity, sewage, storm water runoff, logging, gravel extraction, and careless citizens have caused the Fraser River to be listed as the fourth-most endangered river in British Columbia. She argued that salmon habitat in the Fraser River is regularly compromised to permit industrial activity, and that public concerns are rarely heeded by the municipal governments that approve such activity. Ms. Edwards said that fish farms pose threats to wild stocks. She argued that Atlantic salmon do not belong in the Pacific Ocean and that cramped conditions in fish farms promote the spread of disease. Ms. Edwards said that racism persists in the fishery, and that she believes it is inappropriate for First Nations to be prevented from fishing to feed their family. She pointed to First Nations practices as an example of a sustainable fishery, noting that it is guided by the principle of taking only what one needs.

Sabra Woodworth

Sabra Woodworth responded to the question 'What is required to secure the future of Fraser sockeye?'. Ms. Woodworth explained that her response focussed specifically on the Cohen Commission's investigation of DFO practices, which she said is the commission's central imperative. Ms. Woodworth reviewed previous reports that addressed Fraser sockeye, including numerous Auditor General reports, which she said form the context within which the Cohen Commission's terms of reference must be understood. Ms. Woodworth argued that DFO's habitat impact assessments, monitoring plans, and mitigation measures, particularly as they relate to fish farming, are inadequate or nonexistent. She said that DFO's mandate to promote aquaculture is in direct competition with its mandate to protect wild salmon, and that by refusing to classify it as a fishery DFO has avoided its responsibility to regulate aquaculture. Ms. Woodworth recommended that DFO be divided into a Department of Aquaculture and a Department of Fisheries and that disease and sea lice monitoring of the aquaculture industry be enhanced.

Don Demill

Don Demill presented on sockeye harvesting methods and habitat restoration. He recommended that DFO be renamed the Department of Fish and Oceans to ensure a focus on fish in the broadest sense of the *Fisheries Act*. He said that DFO focuses too specifically on salmon while ignoring other species, and that its promotion of aquaculture represents a fundamental conflict of interest. Mr. Demill further recommended that all Fraser salmon be caught in weirs and traps, which he said would permit fish to be sorted and released, if necessary. On the topic of habitat, Mr. Demill called for widespread habitat improvement projects throughout the Fraser River basin. He recommended the use of causeways and jetties to improve water flow and the reopening of inaccessible sloughs and creeks. He further recommended that jurisdiction over habitat be placed with the Department of Fish and Oceans, that fish ways be made public, and that the remaining rocks from the Hell's Gate slide be removed. He concluded by arguing for greater public control over the fisheries and for increased enforcement of the *Fisheries Act*.

Verna Pigou (Elk Creek Conservation Coalition)

Verna Pigou discussed the importance of public participation in the conservation of Fraser sockeye. She argued that, on environmental matters, the public is treated as a special interest group by corporations and governments. She said that natural resources are disappearing, and that preserving salmon will help ensure the preservation of other species, such as bears. Ms. Pigou argued that the public must be told of the impact of fish farms on wild stocks. She explained that she recently discovered that SLICE prevents certain crustacean species from developing properly. She concluded by emphasizing that the citizens of Canada and British Columbia must protect wild fish at all costs.

Grant Warkentin

Grant Warkentin discussed the 1924 reclamation of Sumas Lake and its possible impact on Fraser sockeye. He described historical accounts of the lake, noting that First Nations histories depict it as having bountiful salmon populations. He discussed the timeline of the reclamation project, explaining that pumping began in July, when sockeye traditionally begin returning, and continued until the spring,

when the outmigration occurs. Mr. Warkentin speculated that this activity may have had a significant impact on local salmon, noting that historical data shows that the start of pumping coincides with a sharp decline in salmon populations. Mr. Warkentin also discussed the 2010 return, suggesting that its size illustrates a lack of knowledge about salmon. He encouraged the Commissioner to recommend further research into Fraser sockeye activity in the marine environment, and argued that more information will improve management and conservation efforts.

Zvonko Bezvák (Ban Cosmetic Pesticide Coalition)

Zvonko Bezvák argued that cosmetic pesticides and the agricultural abuse of toxic chemicals negatively affect salmon and their habitat. He noted that 20 environmental groups, including non-profit cancer organizations, are opposed to cosmetic pesticides, and he called on the Commissioner to recommend a ban on their use.

Rick Quip

Rick Quip discussed DFO's relationship with the Cheam First Nation. He explained that DFO and the Cheam disagree on many topics, including the meaning of 'conservation' and of 'food, social and ceremonial.' He accused DFO of operating primarily on an economic basis, and suggested that it considers First Nations' food, social and ceremonial needs only after addressing commercial and conservation priorities. Mr. Quip explained that he finds it unfair that he has been arrested numerous times for unlicensed fishing to feed his family while the commercial fishery is permitted to harvest fish on an industrial scale. He said that due to the size of the 2010 Fraser sockeye return, some fish may need to be electrocuted to alleviate overcrowding on spawning grounds. Mr. Quip outlined the meaning of the various Pacific salmon species to First Nations. He concluded by calling for further research into the marine portion of the Fraser sockeye lifecycle, and for the Commissioner to conduct a thorough review of DFO's management of the fisheries.