

WITNESS SUMMARY

Sioliya (Councillor June Quipp)

Witness Background

Sioliya (June Quipp) is currently a councillor for the Cheam Indian Band, and previously spent five years as the elected chief. She is a respected elder and member of the Pilalt Tribe at Cheam, and of the Stó:lō Nation. Her Halq'eméylem name, Sioliya, means Great Spirit Protector.

Councillor Quipp comes from the line of traditional leaders of the Cheam community, and many of her family members have continued to occupy prominent leadership positions. Councillor Quipp has fished in the Fraser River all her life, and has a long history of involvement in political struggles related to aboriginal rights and fisheries issues. Councillor Quipp is a community organizer and helps address many community concerns, including social issues. She was a Health representative for the Stó:lō people. She is also an Associate Professor at the University of Victoria in the area of indigenous governance and has supervised a number of master's students to date who have researched issues regarding Cheam, including fisheries.

Territory

Cheam is one of over seven villages that collectively comprise the Pilalt tribe. Councillor Quipp recalls her grandfather describing how the Pilalt Peoples' territories were each defined by a mountain. Today, there are 500 Cheam members, both on and off reserve. Councillor Quipp advises that the distinction is not relevant in regards to the fishery because off-reserve members also come back home to fish.

Traditional participation in the fishery

Councillor Quipp advises that Cheam families have traditionally controlled, used and maintained specific fishing sites along the Fraser River, many of which are still used today. There have also been common fishing areas, such as Yale. For example, the Douglas family has a fishing site near Cheam Beach, which is shared with her siblings and their families. She observes there is increasing pressure on limited fishing opportunities as the Cheam community grows over time. She recalls a time when the community was comprised of only six families. Today, Councillor Quipp is one of 17 siblings who have grown up to have their own families, but still have to share a few traditional fishing sites.

Councillor Quipp explains that it is difficult to definitively say: "this is where I fish, or this is where I hunt." Historically, the Cheam people travelled to different areas based on the harvesting cycle and the availability of food. This is still the case in many ways. Councillor Quipp advises that the people at Cheam traditionally fished with set nets, and would construct their own nets using stinging nettles. She recalls hearing her mother saying that, at one time, DFO came to the community and provided balls of twine for each member and her grandmother made nets out of everyone's twine combined.

Modern participation in the fishery

Councillor Quipp explains that today a number of Cheam fishers, especially younger ones, practice drift net fishing. Drift net fishing is done in small boats close to shore, and involves feeding a net into the water and slowly drifting down the river. Councillor Quipp advises that drift net fishing is only done on specific parts of the river, including a special area along Cheam Beach. The nets do not cover the width of the river, but rather small areas. Councillor Quipp explains that rotation system is used in the drift net fishery, where a fisher will go out to do a single drift, and may have to wait on the beach for six hours until his or her next opportunity to fish.

Councillor Quipp explains that the community has moved towards drift net fishing at Cheam Beach, due to the number of community members who do not all have specific fishing sites. There are not enough set net sites for all the community members in the area. Also, drift net fishing avoids the problem of “corking”, which occurs when a set net is placed down river from one’s fishing spot, and thus prevents anyone immediately upriver from accessing fish.

Councillor Quipp herself is still able to practice set net fishing because she has access to her husband’s traditional fishing area near Union Bar above Hope, since his family is smaller and therefore less people are sharing the resource.

▪ FSC fishery

Councillor Quipp explained that historically her people did not have such a distinction, fishing for salmon was always the basis for their traditional, indigenous economies. Councillor Quipp explains that the Cheam band falls under the collective FSC allocation for the Stó:lō Peoples. She advises that the various tribes do not discuss among themselves how to divide up the allocation.

Councillor Quipp advises that fishers in her community believe that there is no reason to limit sales of fish caught by Aboriginal fishers in years when the community has plenty of fish. However, there is an appreciation that sales may have to be limited in years of low abundance. Councillor Quipp recalls that her late father was against using the term “food fishery” to describe any part of the indigenous fishery. He believed that the DFO employed that terminology as a justification for placing restrictions on the fishery. Her father sold fish for Stó:lō fishermen going back to the 1930s, generating income for the community and enabling him to support his 17 children. Councillor Quipp recalls that the processing would be done in the basement of her home as a child. The Stó:lō fishery did not result in the decline of the Fraser River sockeye salmon then or now.

Councillor Quipp explains that the Stó:lō Tribal Council has an agreement with DFO in regard to catch monitoring for the FSC fishery. She advises that the Cheam Band did receive approximately \$60,000 per year from DFO for the purpose of operating a monitoring program. The Cheam have their own catch monitors who record numbers of fish as they come in. The catch monitors then pass those numbers along to the band office and in turn DFO.

Councillor Quipp explains that the Stó:lō People and Aboriginal People along the Lower Fraser are subject to the most stringent monitoring programme in the world where every one of their fish is counted. Recreational and commercial fishermen are not subject to a similar monitoring programme, rather they have to self-report upon request and overall numbers are based on estimates.

- Economic Opportunity fishery

Councillor Quipp explains that, while several Stó:lō bands have signed agreements with DFO to participate in an Economic Opportunity fishery, the Cheam Band and others have not signed on. She observes that DFO has assigned specific fishing days to signatory bands and to non-signatories, and, in her opinion, the signatories have received preferential treatment.

Councillor Quipp advises that, prior to 1992, the Cheam were generally able to fish for 150 days of the year, with openings from Tuesday to Sunday. However, after 1992 with the inception of the pilot sales program and AFS agreements, the openings and fishing days were gradually reduced, in some cases to as little as 23 days of fishing per year. She believes that DFO used the pilot sales agreements as a means to restrict fishing, and continues to do the same thing today with Economic Opportunity fisheries.

Cultural significance of the Fraser sockeye and act of fishing for it

Councillor Quipp explains that she was taught to fish at a very young age, and has passed on those skills to her children and grandchildren. She has grand-children as young as 12 years old who have already learned how to filet a fish, how to hang a net, and how to shoot game and gut, clean and skin it. Councillor Quipp believes that the continuity of her culture depends on children who have learned those skills, and will pass them on to future generations, and will be able to sustain themselves.

Councillor Quipp explained that a number of her family members have been fully initiated in the traditions of the long-house. She herself was given her name in the longhouse and honours the responsibility that comes along with it. The long house is a central element of their culture and also depends on the salmon and people that help cook and provide food.

Councillor Quipp explains the importance of Cheam Beach to the community, including how the community gathers there in the summer fishing season. She describes how the families spend their summers at Cheam Beach, the children come along and will participate and swim in the river while their parents and older siblings are out fishing. She believes that, if the Cheam cannot practice that lifestyle centered on fishing in the future, a big part of their culture and spirit will be lost.

Councillor Quipp is thankful when she thinks about her family and the richness of their culture. Her people do not base wealth on money alone, like most others do. She is proud of their self-sufficiency and their continuing ability to gain sustenance from the land and the river.

Councillor Quipp explains that it is not only the act of fishing that is significant, but also the sharing and the lifestyle that goes along with it. She observes that the people at Cheam have always taken pride in having enough salmon to feed all the guests who come to their territory and other members of the Stó:lō Nation, including canning for elders. For example, her family has enabled Indigenous Peoples from

all over the province, as far as the Okanagan and Fort St. James, to can fish for the winter. In this way, the process of catching and preserving the fish is a way for the people at Cheam to establish and maintain connection with other First Nations and communities.

Aboriginal worldview / traditional knowledge

Councillor Quipp explains that, in the Cheam worldview, all living things are put on the earth to sustain one another. In this regard, there is a Stó:lō belief that if the salmon feel the people no longer need them, they will stop returning to the rivers. The people at Cheam also hold a first salmon ceremony every year, where the bones and remains of the first fish caught are returned to the river. They always try to use all parts of the fish and respect it.

Observations of historic abundance levels and of decline

Councillor Quipp explains that, in the past, her people did not have to worry about the salmon runs because of the high abundance of salmon returning every year. She recalls hearing stories of there being so many fish that one could walk across the river on their backs. In her lifetime, however, she has seen a constant decline and Cheam leaders have always been concerned about huge numbers of fish being taken by the commercial fishery especially in marine areas. The people at Cheam can always tell when a commercial fishery is opened at the mouth of the river, because they catch a lot less fish in the following days. This concern is documented in historical letters from Cheam chiefs to DFO and in the minutes of numerous meetings with DFO.

Impact of decline

Councillor Quipp explains the decline over the past few years has been devastating. Her heart aches when she considers the possibility of the salmon not returning anymore. Her family did not have to start eating frozen salmon until the 1990s when government policies drastically limited fishing times. She is particularly troubled by the impact of the decline on people in her community who live in poverty. She describes the recent decline as being a life or death issue for her community. For example, Councillor Quipp has a sister who helps provide food for families who would otherwise starve, and she relies heavily on salmon in order to feed them. She contrasts the situation of community members with tourists who go out fishing with guides and do not even eat their catch.

Councillor Quipp is also concerned about the issue of declining health in the community. Many people in her community, including herself, suffer from diabetes. She feels that salmon is one of the best foods to eat in dealing with diabetes. Thus, the health of the community will suffer if people are limited to eating small amounts of salmon.

Interactions and consultations with DFO

She feels that DFO employed a “divide and conquer” strategy that damaged relationships between First Nations. Specifically, DFO would hand out “carrots” to certain bands (e.g. provide them with a bit of funding), which frustrated bands such as Cheam that have refused funding due to disagreement with DFO policies.

Councillor Quipp advises that the same “divide and conquer” strategy is still being employed today.

Visions for involvement in the management of the Fraser sockeye fishery

Councillor Quipp would like to be involved in true joint decision making in regards to the fishery. However, in her experience, First Nations have always ended up reacting in opposition to DFO decision making, and have lacked the capacity to operate in a proactive mode. She thinks it is unfair that First Nations always have to do the compromising.

Councillor Quipp believes that the funding issue has stood in the way of First Nations making collective decisions. There is a real lack of trust among different groups today, which will take time to rebuild. In her view, First Nations have to work on building trust among themselves at meetings that involve Indigenous Peoples from across the province without the presence of DFO. She believes that traditional indigenous protocols and modern technology can be integrated to build consensus amongst Indigenous Peoples regarding salmon fishery along the Fraser River.

Councillor Quipp advises that Cheam have been making efforts to build relationships with other First Nations and users of the resource. For example, in the five previous years, Cheam hosted a wild salmon barbeque, which was open to anyone who wanted to come to the reserve and learn about Cheam culture and traditional practices. Previous attendees included DFO employees, the RCMP, commercial and sports fishermen, and local residents. The purpose of the gathering was to bring people together, but also to educate people regarding their fishing methods and to dispel myths such as that Cheam drift net fishing creates a “wall of death”.

Councillor June Quipp believes that change can happen by engaging Indigenous Peoples and fishers on the ground and educating others about the importance of indigenous protocols and knowledge to ensure a sustainable management of the Fraser River Sockeye Salmon for all future generations.