

WITNESS SUMMARY

Joe Becker

Witness Background

Mr. Becker is from Steveston and has fished for most of his life. He presently sits on the Musqueam Fisheries Commission as one of the six elected commissioners.

▪ Musqueam Fisheries Commission

Mr. Becker and others established the Commission in 1992 as a way of learning what their membership thought about how their fishery should be run. At first, it was basically made up of fishermen, but over time it has evolved to include elders, non-fishers and people from the general populace. The Commission is an evolving group that advises on: how much fish can be sold; how much is allotted to the FSC fishery; how much is distributed for the elders and handicapped, etc. There are times when the Commission has been over-ruled by the membership. The Commission makes recommendations to Chief and Council, but the Chief is always the final decision maker.

Nation

Mr. Becker is a member of the Musqueam First Nation. Today there are approximately 1300 Musqueam members, with half living on reserve and half off.

Traditional Participation in the fishery

Mr. Becker explains how the fishery has always been important to Musqueam. As evidence of this long history, he notes that a 2300 year old net was once found on their reserve.

Mr. Becker explains that the land was different in the past. At one time, one could paddle from Musqueam territory all the way to Tsawwassen. There were sloughs so that when the water was high they could dam up and trap the fish.

The Musqueam prepare fish in a number of ways, including baking, smoking them on a rack, and canning, which is best with the earliest fish (Early Stuart).

Modern participation in the fishery

Mr. Becker explains how his people can no longer afford to fish. Many cannot afford to buy boats and gear. Today they fish with a few conventional gillnetters. There are still runabout boats, but people pull these boats by hand, which is hard work to do in a limited time.

Mr. Becker relates how, since 1992, when the AFS agreements came into effect, the economic opportunities for First Nations have dwindled substantially. Over the past couple of years, there have been very few commercial openings. These opportunities are dictated by what is in the AFS agreement. Mr. Becker does not think that his people need the agreement to get their FSC needs. Instead, he believes that DFO needs the agreement as a management tool. Mr. Becker believes that First Nations

have the ability to manage as well, and could contract with DFO to give them the information that they require.

This year, Mr. Becker advises that over 100 licenses were issued to about 40 to 50 vessels. He estimates that a couple of hundred members were out on the water. The fishers provide salmon to meet the needs of the elders and people with disabilities. Mr. Becker says his people are thankful that those fishers have the heart and mind to do that for the band. He advises that the band helps pay for their fuel, but not for them to fish. Musqueam's internal policy is that if someone has a family member fishing, then they should go to that family member, and not the band, for fish. That policy is consistent with their traditional practices, their culture of sharing.

Mr. Becker explains that DFO has allocated 400,000 FSC pieces for the Lower Fraser First Nations, of which the Musqueam receive 70,000. Thus, when DFO meets with Musqueam before the season, there is a base amount of 70,000. DFO has said that if there is a TAC, the Musqueam have the option of transferring certain number of fish from FSC to commercial. This means that, prior to the start of fishing, Musqueam has to choose how many fish of the 70,000 are going to be transferred for sale. Previously, DFO had allowed them to transfer fish from FSC to commercial, and then back if the fish did not arrive. But DFO has since stopped allowing that, so Musqueam essentially has to roll the dice in making that decision. That is what is being called the new "integrated fishery".

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

Mr. Becker finds it hard to explain the significance of sockeye to his people. He says that they were simply brought up with fish; fish is a part of them. For example, whenever there is a function in the long house, there are two main ingredients for the food; one is fish and the other is wild game. In order to prepare, the Commission gets an idea from their membership regarding how many functions will be going on in the winter in the longhouse. As commissioners, they have a responsibility to ensure that fish is caught and put away for those functions.

Traditional Knowledge

Mr. Becker believes that traditional knowledge is not frozen in time. It is knowledge held by traditional people that still continues today. It involves understanding what happens on the river, and applying practical knowledge on the river every day.

Collaborative processes with other First Nations

Mr. Becker thinks that there has to be an umbrella group to work with government and other sectors to help develop realistic policy. Individual negotiations with Musqueam fisheries would have to reside with the Chief and council and their fisheries commission. However, to effectively address all issues, there has to be one body, in which they, as First Nations, could put their faith. In Mr. Becker's opinion, the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC) is the body that should be at the table representing First Nations.

Interactions and consultations with DFO

Mr. Becker thinks that the days of co-management with DFO are long gone. DFO does not consult; they dictate. He explains that there was co-management early on in the program, when DFO would send a senior bureaucrat from Ottawa to come out and *ask* them how they wanted to fish. But now, DFO sends the lowest ranking person to come out and *tell* them how they are going to fish that year, and to demand they sign an agreement or else not fish. It is not true co-management because the person he is talking to has no authority; they just enact policy from headquarters.

Mr. Becker explains that, in the past, Musqueam have been involved in serious negotiations with senior level bureaucrats as high up as the deputy minister. He advises that the Musqueam designed a fishery similar to the commercial fishery as part of their AFS agreement. Musqueam spent two years negotiating, collectively with other Lower Fraser First Nations, to obtain some kind of agreement with DFO. They hired two biologists to assist with going over the numbers. Their group met collectively with DFO and tabled a two page document with DFO's senior level people who viewed it, made changes, and proposed amendments. At the end they reached a five-year agreement with allowance for re-negotiation on an annual basis.

Now, however, Mr. Becker explains that DFO is not engaged in what he would call real consultations. He observes that - while DFO makes projections of run sizes by January - AFS agreements are not dealt with until July, by which time it becomes a take it or leave it deal. DFO develops policy at the headquarter level which is then fed down to regional people who have no authority or flexibility to change it. That is Mr. Becker's perception of how things have changed. At one time, First Nations and DFO could sit down together at a table, whereas now it is essentially a dictatorship.

- AAROM

Musqueam does not currently participate in AAROM bodies or get AAROM money. However, they are trying to formulate a new AAROM body on the Lower Fraser called the Lower Fraser Aboriginal Fisheries Authority.

- Forum/Roadmap

The Forum/Roadmap is the only process that the Musqueam currently participate in.

Visions for involvement in the management of the Fraser sockeye fishery

In Mr. Becker's opinion, what is needed is to get a group of everyone together – environmentalists, FNs, industry. He believes that one cannot simply put your finger on one cause; all of the problems need to be addressed or the fishery is going to collapse. He would like to see some semblance of an agreement with recreational fishers, the commercial fishers, some trustworthy biologists, and somebody from industry that has some capability of regulating what can happen in the river.

He explains that the Musqueam educate their young people that their right is held communally and it has to go through the community not just through an individual. He believes the same approach should be brought to everyone else.

Perspective on prohibition on sale of FSC fish

Mr. Becker advises that Musqueam have always felt that it had a right to access food fish. Musqueam do not propose to break the law and sell FSC, but they do want to have a definition of “social” or “societal” in FSC, which they believe is something that they should define. Mr. Becker does not eat fish 365 days a year, but he can certainly go out and convert some of his food fish to a hamburger or steak. He thinks it is not right that First Nations are told that if they go FSC fishing, then they cannot sell the fish to satisfy other needs. They should have that right; the fish belongs to them. As he sees it, what aboriginal people do with their fish has no effect on other user groups in the country. He points out that commercial fisherman are not told that they have to sell all the fish they catch, but First Nations are told they cannot trade or barter their fish. He notes that the prohibition is also unenforceable; DFO does not have the manpower and the bands are not going to do it.

Mr. Becker believes that the important thing was to put his people on an allocation. Now that that has been done, DFO should not be telling them what they can do with the fish. As long as the fish are counted, then he does not see what else matters.