

WITNESS SUMMARY

Grand Chief Saul Terry

Witness Background

Grand Chief Terry is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Intertribal Treaty Organization (ITO), and a Commissioner on the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC). He has been involved in fisheries matters for a number of years.

In years past, Grand Chief Terry has been a leader in his community at the tribal and Nation level, as well as the organizational leader at the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. He was also chairman of the Central Interior Tribal Council, a coalition of six tribes that came together to discuss the business of their peoples in a collective way in the 1970s and into the 1980s.

Grand Chief Terry is also an artist and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, primarily in sculpture, but also does other types of visual art. He is a survivor of the Indian residential school system, having spent 12 years at a school in Kamloops.

Nation

Grand Chief Terry is St'at'imc and a member of the Xwisten Community (Bridge River Band) near Lillooet.

Traditional participation in the fishery

Grand Chief Terry can speak about the different fishing methods that his people used historically together with those still used today, including nets, dip nets, spears, and weirs. He explains how those kinds of techniques were selective and conservation minded as they allowed the people to let certain fish through to ensure good progeny for their future.

Cultural significance of the Fraser sockeye and impact of the decline

Grand Chief Terry believes that the issue of how so-called industrial progress has impacted on First Nations is a profound question. The culture has been impacted, significantly, and communities are just now reasserting themselves to regain some control. When Grand Chief Terry returned to his community in 1970, there was no electricity or central heating in the homes, and children were still being shipped out of the community to attend residential schools. The impacts were profound and far-reaching, and many communities are still very dysfunctional politically, socially, economically, culturally, spiritually. Grand Chief Terry believes these kinds of impact make efforts to restore and redevelop communities so important. Grand Chief Terry cites the ITO as an example of an effort to establish a foundation upon which the education process, as it relates to the significance of the resources to First Nations, will redevelop again.

Observations of historic abundance levels and of decline

Grand Chief Terry has heard stories of salmon abundance so great that they changed the colours of the rivers. There were so many fish that you could almost walk across their backs. That kind of abundance is not even fathomable now; the impacts on stocks have really diminished those numbers.

Regarding the theory of “over-escapement”, Grand Chief Terry’s view is that “nature looks after itself quite well”.

Impact of Decline

While in Carrier country this summer for an annual meeting, Grand Chief Terry heard some elders saying, “you know, we haven’t fished for so long that we haven’t had the ability to pass on a lot of the practices and culture traditions to the younger people”.

Grand Chief Terry notes that in communities like Quesnel and upwards in the Fraser watershed, the salmon runs have declined to a level where it is not possible for people and communities to continue practicing their culture surrounding the fish. It is not only a matter of being able to catch fish for food, but also having the opportunity to practice everything that surrounds that activity. From his point of view, DFO does not seem to understand or appreciate that. Fishing, for First Nations, is not just a question of numbers. The cultural issue is quite a profound thing that has to be addressed, and is not considered in the various policies put forward by DFO. For example, if DFO allocates only 500 fish for the area from Quesnel on up to Takla, how could that number possibly serve a community 8000 people? In 2009, the St’at’imc Nation made a decision to allow fishing in order to provide for families in need.

Traditional Protocols

The communities also had fish Chiefs to ensure that enough fish passed up-river. The fish Chief’s role was to decide when enough fish had passed, and give the nod to commence the fishing. It was a ceremonial observation as well as a conservation initiative.

Collaborative processes with other First Nations

Grand Chief Terry states that although the ITO is a work in progress, having been formally established with an office only last January, it is based on a very old network of various Nation relationships within the region. It is something old that is becoming new again in the eyes of many people.

The ITO has been making tremendous efforts to get the ear of DFO and others involved with fisheries in order to communicate its goal of forming a Nation-to-Nation structure to address the fisheries issue. The primary mandate of the ITO is fisheries and related topics, with a principle focus on salmon and sockeye salmon in the Fraser Watershed. The ITO is focussed on the Fraser watershed because the organization is based on the 1989 Intertribal Fisheries Treaty among the eight Nations.

Grand Chief Terry explains that after so many years of Government, including DFO, working on a band-by-band basis, there is some resistance to moving toward a Nation-to-Nation approach. He points out

that many have no idea of how to operate on the Nation level because Aboriginal people have been compartmentalized down to the tribal council or band level. Their history has been rewritten. Grand Chief Terry's challenge is to convince the federal, provincial and First Nations governments that the Nation approach is the best way to go forward

Grand Chief Terry also explains that addressing fisheries issues at the Nation level, as opposed to the band level, would be more economical. Instead of having eleven St'at'imc Chiefs attend a meeting, one person could be mandated to meet regarding the fishery, and would have authority to make decisions on behalf of all, and would have to return to the others as and when needed.

In his vision of the ITO, the ultimate objective is for the representatives of each Nation to be able to speak for and bind their communities. The representatives would have authority to make decisions because they sit in council among their own people, where determinations could be made regarding the fishing plan for the year. What is anticipated is that all Nations have a proposed fishing plan so that each is in a position to speak to their fishing plans for the year.

Currently, the ITO has four active signatory Nations, which represent 55 communities, and representatives from those four Nations could be given authority to say, for example, what the fishing plan for 2011 would look like.

Grand Chief Terry also believes that the ITO structure has to involve Nations in marine and coastal areas, and he has been initiating these discussions.

It is Grand Chief Terry's view that the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC) is more focused on technical and policy issues than the ITO. The ITO is looking at fisheries issues in a different light, specifically at having Nations form the basis of the decision-making structure. The ITO believes that Nations, which have the leadership and knowledge required for fisheries management, ought to be recognized as entities that need to be dealt with by the Crown; this view is not necessarily in line with the status quo.

Visions for involvement in the management of the Fraser sockeye fishery

Grand Chief Terry envisions collaboration with DFO taking the form of co-management. For example, Northern St'at'imc Fisheries has established a small working group with DFO with an equal number of parties representing each side. The parties come together to make decisions regarding the fisheries plan for the Lillooet area, also how to monitor the fishery, and when to hold off on taking certain stocks to ensure their return to northern areas (e.g. the St'at'imc established a policy of not fishing early Stuarts unless absolutely necessary). The working group is a forum where the St'at'imc can pass on their knowledge and understanding of certain stocks to DFO, and vice versa.

Also, Grand Chief Terry thinks it is quite possible that the ITO could work with DFO in regards to the overall management of the fishery. The role envisioned for the ITO is to work on that relationship and interface with DFO in the future. If that occurs, management could be handled more easily because each Nation knows their territory well and the difficulties the fish may encounter there. Each Nation

would know best how the fish there can be conserved or protected for future generations - that is the notion the ITO is pushing for.

In terms of decision making, Grand Chief Terry sees himself as an example of what could happen if Indigenous peoples have a seat at the table, and have a role in decisions with respect to resources that affect them. He believes his presence, although relatively new, on the PSC has been beneficial. For many years, Grand Chief Terry has been promoting the idea of having First Nation representatives in those kinds of initiatives. He believes that is the way of the future.

Grand Chief Terry believes it is important for the Commissioners to grasp the history of what has happened to First Nations in the Pacific region, and how First Nations are trying to work themselves back into having a role in protecting what's left of the resources. He hopes the Commissioners understand First Nations' profound ambition to be recognized for who they are and where they are at, rather than being treated as a rubber stamp by decision makers from Ottawa, or wherever else.

Grand Chief Terry views the ITO as being the most practical way of approaching the issue. He thinks it is the reasonable and right thing to do, and will be good for the future of the fishery. The ITO is being sorted out among the Interior Nations, but it is a work in progress and more work is required to clarify and expand its scope.

Grand Chief Terry believes First Nations' involvement is paramount to preserving and conserving the fish stocks. First Nations are struggling to say 'recognize us' for who we are, where we are, and how we can be part of the actions required to make our futures more meaningful.