

WITNESS SUMMARY

Gary Ducommun

Witness Background

Gary Ducommun is the Director of Natural Resources for the Métis Nation of BC (MNBC). Mr. Ducommun is a professional biologist, specializing in fish culture in his early career. He was the Vice President and General Manager of I.B.E.C. Aquaculture Corporation from 1987-1992, but left due to his disillusionment with the inability of fish farms to operate in an environmentally sound manner. Mr. Ducommun moved on to become the aboriginal fisheries advisor for the Cariboo Tribal Council from 1993-1999. He has worked for MNBC for the past six years. He is a member of a joint MNBC/UBC team involved in studying the history of the Métis people in BC.

Métis Nation of BC

Métis are mobile people, and there is a community of Métis throughout BC. Métis people are generally located in all of the river valleys (e.g. Lower Mainland, Kamloops, Williams Lake, Fort St. James), which is not that much different than where Métis lived 200 years ago. The Métis do not live in communities *per se* - there is no Métis reserve, for example. But Métis do come together for social functions, and have community offices in different regions that deliver services to Métis people. There are approximately 60,000 people in BC who self-identify as Métis, according to the 2006 federal census. Of these, approximately 6000 are now registered MNBC members. MNBC has been registering approximately 1000 new members every year.

MNBC is a provincial organization formed in 1996, and is one of five provincial entities (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and BC) that comprise the Métis National Council. The structure of MNBC mirrors the structure of the provincial government. MNBC has elected directors who are appointed as the Minister of a portfolio (e.g. natural resources, citizenship, education). MNBC has seven regional entities that are represented by regional governance councils.

Mr. Ducommun works for the MNBC in a bureaucratic capacity. He is not elected and reports to the Minister responsible for Natural Resources.

Aboriginal perspective / worldview

Métis have always been fishermen as well as hunters and trappers, and were bred by Europeans to do those tasks. In what is now BC, the presence of Métis people is documented in records prior to 1800. Métis history reflects an ongoing interest in the Fraser river salmon fishery.

Historically, Métis were buffalo hunters in the prairies, and thus learned about resource exploitation the hard way. Métis witnessed how government policy killed off the buffalo, and understand how a population of millions can become none. The buffalo remains an important part of Métis history and cultural events, and some Métis are now involved in efforts to recover buffalo populations in Alberta. In

BC, there is reference in historical documents to Métis people describing salmon as “the Buffalo of this country”.

Métis people are mixed-race, and have a different value set that is a blend of European and aboriginal concepts. Many Métis continue to hold values that are consistent with the aboriginal worldview - that people are part of the environment and not outside it - while other Métis have accepted European worldviews founded on science and the paramountcy of resource exploitation.

Historic and modern participation in the fishery

Mr. Ducommun advises that Métis have always participated in the fishery for sustenance. Fishing was a social practice for Métis people, but social fishing is subdued now because of uncertainty surrounding their legal rights. Thus, Métis no longer go out fishing together in large groups; rather, they go out in ones and twos, or go along with friends or relatives from First Nations. Many Métis have family connections in First Nations, and rely on those connections for opportunities to fish.

If Métis were able to resolve their legal position in regards to the fishery, Mr. Ducommun believes that fishing would again become a social activity for Métis, as is now the case with hunting.

Importance of traditional knowledge in the management of the Fraser sockeye fishery

Mr. Ducommun's view is that traditional knowledge has to be integrated into the decision making process. On one side, scientists argue that there is no place for “unsubstantiated” information in decision making; while on the other, Aboriginal people will say that they understand the resources as well as scientists. Regardless of whom is right, Mr. Ducommun thinks that the real benefit to incorporating traditional knowledge in management is the engagement of aboriginal people, which will lead to understanding and support of DFO decision making in regards to salmon. In his opinion, DFO should be involved in looking for the people who hold traditional knowledge.

Mr. Ducommun advises that traditional knowledge and science have begun to merge in some areas, and specifically in the area of nutrient deficiencies and artificial fertilization of sockeye systems. Aboriginal people have always believed that salmon feed the environment they live. Each salmon that dies in the river recycles its nutrients (which are gained from the marine environment) and provides nourishment for animals, plants, insects, as well as future generations of salmon. In line with this view, scientific studies have shown that river ecosystems are experiencing nutrient (of marine-derived nitrogen and phosphorous) resulting from the decline of salmon returns. DFO has known about nutrient deficiencies for many years and now artificially fertilizes sockeye systems.

Mr. Ducommun explains that government bodies are also beginning to see the value of blending traditional knowledge and western-based science. For example, the Government of Canada through the *Species at Risk Act* has developed the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). This Committee, while dominated by scientists, has two traditional knowledge elements which could serve as a model for DFO. The first element is an Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) sub-committee which is made up of aboriginal peoples (Inuit, First Nation and Métis). The second

element is the National Aboriginal Committee on Species at Risk (NACOSAR) which provides recommendations related to listings and recovery plans to directly the Minister of Environment. Métis Nation BC has representatives on both the ATK sub-committee and at the NACOSAR.

Collaborative processes with other First Nations

Mr. Ducommun advises that MNBC does engage with other First Nations in regards to fisheries issues, but it is all done informally.

Interactions and consultations with DFO

Mr. Ducommun explains that DFO has refused attempts by Métis to discuss their harvesting, even though Métis people eat a significant number of Fraser sockeye. At present, MNBC is not participating in consultative processes with DFO regarding harvesting, although Métis have been consulted around certain habitat issues. DFO Pacific refuses to enter AFS agreements with Métis, even though DFO's other regions have entered AFS agreements with Métis communities there. Mr. Ducommun observes that BC Métis are treated differently than First Nations, and even other Métis from different provinces.

Mr. Ducommun advises that, ultimately, Métis want to be active participants in managing the resource, and be consulted. Thus, if DFO is making decisions that influence salmon, Mr. Ducommun believes it should be looking for comment from MNBC. As well, he notes that MNBC could collect data on the Métis harvest, and without that data, DFO will not have accurate numbers for the aboriginal harvest. He estimates that the Métis harvest would amount to approximately 100,000 sockeye annually.

Visions for involvement in the management of the Fraser sockeye fishery

Mr. Ducommun explains that DFO must begin to expand their management of Salmon resources to reflect a holistic view. To do this, the Pacific Region must reorganize to shed the silo management structure they currently maintain. He is looking for a paradigm shift where DFO manages in the best interest of resource, from a holistic point of view, rather than simply managing in response to various special interests. Mr. Ducommun advises that Métis support a risk-averse approach to management that allows surplus spawners; they do not view it as a bad thing.

Mr. Ducommun believes that Métis and First Nations need to be included in evolution of the commercial fishery.

Mr. Ducommun explains that Métis are not looking for help from the Commissioner; rather, they are looking to encourage change for the benefit of the resource. He refers to the Cree proverb which says: "not until the last fish or deer are gone do we find out that we can't eat money". The Métis want the resource to be there for their children and grandchildren.

Perspectives on prohibition of sale of FSC fish

Mr. Ducommun observes that DFO's processes have done little to control "illegal" sales. He believes that DFO may never achieve control illegal sales because it involves taking income away from people

who: (1) desperately need it, (2) believe it is their right, (3) believe that DFO is giving non-aboriginals their fish to then sell, and (4) experience fishing as a way of life grounded in history. Moreover, there is no question that aboriginal people have always bartered and traded fish, even if not for cash.