

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the
Fraser River Panel of the Pacific Salmon Commission

Held at the Executive Airport Plaza
Richmond, B.C.
August 18, 2006

PRESENT: PANEL MEMBERS

UNITED STATES

Mr. J. Long (Chair)
Mr. D. Cantillon
Mr. R. Kehoe
Ms. L. Loomis
Mr. R. Charles
Mr. J. Giard
Mr. T. Tynan

CANADA

Mr. P. Ryall (Vice-Chair)
Mr. M. Griswold
Mr. T. Lubzinski
Mr. L. Wick
Mr. T. Bird
Mr. R. Brahniuk

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr. G. Graves (Co-Chair)
Mr. K. Adicks
Ms. S. McAvinchey

Mr. L. Jantz (Co-Chair)
Mr. R. Goruk
Mr. J. Grout
Mr. M. Staley

STAFF

Mr. D. Kowal, Executive Secretary
Mr. J. Cave
Mr. J. Gable

Mr. I. Guthrie
Mr. M. Lapointe
Mr. B. White

ADVISORS AND GUESTS

Mr. R. Bridden, J.S. McMillan Fisheries Ltd.
Mr. A. Chapman, Lummi Nation
Mr. T. Hillaire, Lummi Nation
Ms. A.M. Huang, DFO
Mr. G. Jones, Cdn. Commissioner

Mr. R. Kinley, Lummi Nation
Mr. G. MacWilliams, Nooksack Tribe
Ms. B. Mueller, DFO
Ms. A. Seiders, NWIFC
Mr. J. Wilson, Lummi Nation

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m., August 18, 2006.

1. Agenda

The Panel approved the agenda (Attachment 1).

2. Fishery Data Update

Mr. Gable reported that the migration of sockeye through Area 20 had been steady over recent days and that catches had been good in the Area 20 purse seine test fishery on August 17. The projected daily escapement through Juan de Fuca Strait using historic expansion lines is in the range of 150,000 to 250,000 fish. Test fishing catches in Johnstone Strait indicate a steady migration of sockeye through this approach route as well, with daily projected migration from about 150,000 to 175,000 sockeye. The estimated diversion rate of sockeye through Johnstone Strait is presently between 50% and 60%. Catches of sockeye in the Area H troll test fishery suggest that some sockeye may be migrating deeper than normal this season and therefore they may not be currently fully assessed by the test fishing programs. This could result in under-estimates of their daily migratory abundance.

Estimates of Late-run sockeye that may be delaying are presently low and in the range of 100,000 to 150,000 sockeye. Test fisheries in the lower Fraser River are indicating a strong migration into the river and are presently exceeding the abundance projected from marine areas. Late-run sockeye presently comprise 25% to 30% of the sockeye migrating in the lower Fraser River. Estimates of the escapement of Fraser sockeye past Mission through August 17 are: 533,000 Early Summer-run, 533,000 Summer-run, and 327,000 Late-run sockeye. Estimates of Harrison sockeye escapements are presently about double the forecast level of abundance at this time. The projected escapement of sockeye into the Fraser River from August 18 through August 23 is 787,000 fish.

The results of recent sockeye DNA analyses were reviewed. Analyses of recent samples from Johnstone Strait indicate that Late-run sockeye are presently in proportions ranging from about 50% to 60%. Samples from the lower Fraser River indicate that many Late Shuswap and Harrison sockeye are migrating directly into the river. Early Summer-run sockeye proportions are higher than expected while the proportion of Summer-run sockeye has been lower than expected; in particular Horsefly sockeye appear to be in much lower proportions than were expected for this time in the season.

Fraser River sockeye catches to date were reviewed and the total to date is 2,140,000 fish.

3. Abundance and Timing Assessments

Mr. Lapointe stated that the migration of Early Summer-run sockeye is protracted this season and that they still comprise approximately 15% of the sockeye migrating through the marine assessment areas. Quesnel sockeye are tracking far below expectations and it is highly unlikely that they will return close to their forecast level of abundance. The size of Quesnel smolts in 2004 (2.01 grams) was very small and may have contributed to low marine survival. Conversely, Shuswap smolts (3.7 grams) and Chilko smolts (5.2 grams) were much larger in 2004.

Approximately 1,028,000 Early Summer-run sockeye have been accounted thus far in catch and escapement and an additional 1,400,000 are projected to be en route through Area 20. Estimates of Early Summer-run sockeye abundance from the run size models based on 50% timing through Area 20 are as follows: Cumulative Passage (CP) model – 1,250,000 (one week later than expected), 1,400,000 (ten days later than expected); Cumulative Normal (CN) model - 346,000 Early Misc. (16 days later than expected), 2,040,000 Scotch/Seymour (13 days later than expected) for a total of 2,387,000 fish; Bayes model - 1,430,000 fish (August 11) and with the tail of the run added in, 1,640,000 fish, 1,490,000 fish (August 12) and with the tail of the run added in, 1,700,000 fish. A run size estimate of 1,600,000 Early Summer-run sockeye seems reasonable and 1,700,000 fish is possible given that they still comprise approximately 15% of the sockeye migrating through the assessment areas.

Approximately 1,100,000 Summer-run sockeye have been accounted thus far in catch and escapement and an additional 1,560,000 are projected to be en route through Area 20. Estimates of Summer-run sockeye abundance from the run size models based on 50% timing through Area 20 are as follows: CP model – 3,100,000 (August 16, one week later than forecast), 3,900,000 (August 19), and 5,400,000 (August 23); CN model - 630,000 Late Stuart/Stellako (August 18), 3,800,000 Chilko (August 27), 1,350,000 Quesnel (August 26) for a total estimate of 5,780,000 Summer-run sockeye; 560,000 Late Stuart/Stellako (August 15), 2,200,000 Chilko (August 20), 900,000 Quesnel (August 21) for a total estimate of 3,600,000 Summer-run sockeye; Bayes model - 2,500,000 fish (August 14), 2,900,000 (August 16), 3,300,000 August 18, 3,500,000 (August 19), and 4,700,000 (August 24). Staff advise staying at the current run size estimate of 4,020,000 Summer-run sockeye (75% p. forecast) for now.

Assessments of Late-run sockeye (Adams and Weaver) based on 50% migration timing through Area 20 area tracking as follows: 10,500,000 (August 25), 7,285,000 (August 22, which is one week later than expected), 50% forecast of abundance (August 23), 3,800,000 (August 15), and 75% p. forecast of abundance (August 18). It is early in the return of Late-run sockeye and it is not necessary to move to a run size estimate near the 75% p. forecast level.

Staff recommend staying at the 75% p level forecast of abundance for Summer-run sockeye and a run size estimate of 1,700,000 Early Summer-run sockeye. Mr. Griswold asked what the run size estimates would be using the Johnstone Strait purse seine model that had been used in previous years. Mr. Lapointe replied that staff would provide estimates from this model at a future meeting. Mr. Jantz suggested conducting a retrospective analysis of the run size models for Early Summer-run sockeye to determine which model typically performs the best. Mr. Jantz asked which Early Summer-run stocks were still most prevalent in the DNA analyses and Mr. Lapointe replied that they were mainly North Thompson sockeye stocks. Mr. Griswold noted that there have been reports of sockeye feeding in Canadian waters and Ms. Seiders commented that there have also been reports that some sockeye caught in U.S fisheries have had small herring and krill in them.

4. Current Environmental Conditions and Management Adjustment (MA) Assessment

Mr. Guthrie noted that the weather forecast was for warmer than average temperatures over the next 10 days and that the discharge of the Fraser River was at a record low for this date. The water temperature of the Fraser River at Qualark Creek was 18.4 °C yesterday and is forecast to reach 20 °C by next Thursday August 21, which would be approximately 3 °C higher than average and would set temperature records for this period.

If the run size of Early Summer-run sockeye was 1,500,000 the pMA estimate is 0.59 and the MA is 320,000 fish. Staff would require direction on whether the current MA estimates will be retained or the current run size estimate and new associated MA estimates for Early Summer-run sockeye will be adopted. Mr. Ryall asked what the impacts would be from the very low Fraser discharges and Mr. Guthrie replied that the sockeye may migrate faster and additional obstructions to migration may be present. Mr. Tynan asked where obstructions to migration may occur at these low flows and Mr. Lapointe answered that the Bridge River rapids can be a problem for migrating sockeye at low flows. Mr. Tynan also asked for an update on the condition of migrating sockeye and Mr. Jantz replied that they were presently in good condition with few fish exhibiting scarring.

5. Total Allowable Catch Scenarios

Mr. Lapointe reviewed the current status of TACs and the balance of catches available to each country. He noted that there different options for estimating the Early Summer-run MA, which impacts the balance of catches available to each country. As long as the Summer-run run size exceeds 3,500,000 fish, there is presently catch available. Mr. Cantillon asked what the proportion of Early Summer-run sockeye was likely to be next week in U.S. waters. Mr. Lapointe replied that it was likely to be less than 5% and that for management purposes, when stocks comprise less than 10% of the abundance in an area, they are generally considered to be incidental catch.

The meeting recessed at 12:15 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 2:00 p.m.

The Panel agreed to run size estimates of 1,700,000 Early Summer-run sockeye and 4,020,000 Summer-run sockeye (the 75% p level forecast). The Panel also agreed to a pMA factor for Early Summer-run sockeye of 0.54 and an MA of 332,000 fish.

6. Fishery Recommendations

Mr. Ryall announced the following Canadian Panel Area fishery proposals:

Area 18-1, 18-4 and 18-11 and Area 29-1 to 6: As previously announced: the Area H troll: ITQ Demonstration Fishery remains open until further notice.

Area 20 – 1, 3, 4: Open to Area B purse seine in waters deeper than 55 meters or 30 fathoms from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday, August 21, 2006. Fishery may extend subject to by-catch concerns (Please refer to DFO Fishery Notices for further details).

Area 29: Portions of 29 - 3, 4, 6, 7 , 9, 10 and 11 to 17: Open to Area E gillnets from 7 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Tuesday, August 22, 2006. There will be a possible re-opening of this fishery on Wednesday. (Please refer to the DFO Fishery Notices for further updates that will be available Tuesday evening).

Mr. Ryall also reviewed current fishing plans in Area D and that Chair-to-Chair meetings would likely be needed on Monday and Tuesday to discuss various fishing plans in Canada.

Mr. Long stated that the U.S. had the following Panel Area fishery proposals:

Treaty Indian Fisheries:

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Extended for drift gillnets from 12:00 p.m. (noon), Saturday, August 19, 2006, to 12:00 p.m. (noon) Wednesday, August 23, 2006.

Areas 6, 7, and 7A: Open to net fishing from 4:00 a.m., Monday, August 21, 2006 to 10:00 p.m. Tuesday, August 22, 2006.

Non-Indian Fisheries:

Areas 7 and 7A: As previously announced: Open to gillnets from 8:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. (midnight) Friday, August 18, 2006. Open to gillnets from 8:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. (midnight) Wednesday, August 23, 2006.

Areas 7 and 7A: As previously announced: Open to reef nets from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Saturday, August 19, 2006. Open to reef nets from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Sunday, August 20, 2006.

Areas 7 and 7A: As previously announced: Open to purse seines from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Friday, August 18, 2006. Open to purse seines from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Wednesday, August 23, 2006.

7. Assessment of Recommendations Relative to Plan and In-season Information

Mr. Lapointe stated that based on the current run size estimates and MAs, there should be sufficient outstanding catch to support the fisheries proposed by Canada and the United States. Mr. Long noted that the U.S. supports the proposed Canadian fisheries and Mr. Ryall added that Canada supports the proposed U.S. fisheries.

11 Next Meeting

The Panel agreed that there would be Chair-to-Chair Panel meetings on August 21 and 22 and a full Panel meeting on August 22 as well.

8. Upstream Escapement Report

Mr. Jantz reported that the peak spawning period for Early Stuart sockeye is complete. The total escapement of sockeye past the enumeration fences on four creeks in the Early Stuart system through August 16 has reached almost 9,400 sockeye, which exceeds the brood year (2002) escapement past the fences. The enumeration fence on Scotch Creek was operational on August 6 and almost 5,900 sockeye have migrated past the fence thus far. The Nadina River spawning channel operator has counted almost 500 sockeye through the fence to-date. The McKinley Creek enumeration fence was operational on August 9, however no sockeye have passed the fence thus far. Chilko sockeye were first observed at Henry's Bridge on August 11 and over 700 sockeye were observed on August 16. The counting fence at Sweltzer Creek has enumerated 160 Cultus Lake sockeye through August 16.

The meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

John Long, Chair

Paul Ryall, Vice-Chair