

MEMORANDUM FOR THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FAM

**DECISION GUIDELINES FOR THE RECREATIONAL FRASER RIVER SOCKEYE
FISHERY**

(Information Only)

SUMMARY

- In the 1999 allocation policy, DFO made a commitment to review the management of the recreational sockeye fishery prior to the commencement of the 2006 fishery.
- Implementing decision guidelines in advance of the recreational sockeye fishing season will bring transparency to in-season decision making. This will benefit both fishery managers and the recreational fishing community.

Background

- Allocation Principle 4 from an Allocation Policy for Pacific Salmon, October 1999 states that after conservation needs are met, and priority access for First Nations is met, recreational anglers will be provided with predictable and stable fishing opportunities for sockeye, pink and chum salmon.
- The following recommendation was made in the review of the 2002 Fraser River sockeye fishery: “It is recommended that consultations be initiated with the Sport Fishing Advisory Board to address concerns regarding the regulation of the recreational fishery, its linkage to the First Nations and commercial fisheries, and possible impediments to the provision of stable and predictable opportunities for the recreational harvest of sockeye.”
- The allocation policy states that management activities will allow an orderly expansion of the recreational harvest while minimizing the adverse impacts on the commercial fishery. The allocation policy does not explicitly tie recreational openings to commercial openings however the recreational sector has 5% of the TAC
- In 2005, the SFAB passed a motion requesting that the fishery off the Fraser River mouth be opened or closed at the same time as other south coast waters unless there is evidence of Late run sockeye holding in the area.

Analysis / DFO Comment

- The South Coast tidal water sockeye fishery is a low impact fishery in comparison to commercial and First Nations fisheries. Harvest in tidal waters is dependent on fish abundance and is generally in the range of 3 – 7 000 fish¹.
- The in-river recreational Fraser sockeye fishery harvest is a medium to high impact fishery. Recent harvests have been in the range of 50-120 000 fish. 2006 anticipated harvest is 100-150 000 fish.
- Recreational fisheries can be limited by restricting retention, time and area closures, and reduced daily limits.
- The large majority of the recreational catch of Fraser River sockeye occurs upstream of the Sumas River confluence with the Fraser River; resulting in minimal impacts on endangered Cultus Lake sockeye.

Existing Decision Guidelines:

In order to allow for orderly openings and closures given the unique requirements (large number of participants and large geographic area) of the fishery, the Department has committed to the following, subject to conservation concerns:

- 1) Providing the recreational community at least 48 hours notice of a closure to the recreational sockeye fishery. This may not always be possible due to conservation concerns.
- 2) Avoiding implementing closures on weekends or stat holidays (i.e. a closure would come into place Monday at 00:01 not on a Saturday or Sunday).

Proposed Additional Decision Guidelines for 2006:

South Coast Marine Waters and Fraser River above Hope

Allow sockeye retention in the tidal water recreational sockeye fishery, including the waters off the mouth of the Fraser, as soon as:

- 95% of the Early Stuart sockeye run have passed into the Fraser River;
- South Coast marine and in-river First Nation FSC fisheries are taking place;
- a harvestable surplus for recreational/commercial harvesters is expected to be available.

The recreational sockeye fishery in marine waters would remain open until:

- a change in information leads to the expectation that conservation and FN FSC needs will not be met for any management aggregate (e.g. Early Stuart, Early Summer, Summer, Late) present and abundance of that aggregate is greater than 10% of total abundance in marine waters.
- the allowable exploitation rate on Cultus or Late run sockeye is at or near the management objective;
- Late run sockeye management concerns are present (e.g. high pre-spawn mortalities, fish

¹ Pacific Salmon Commission Reports on Fraser River Sockeye Salmon Fishing Seasons – 2000, 2001 and 2005.

- holding in the gulf);
- The Interior Fraser coho window closure is in place.

Fraser River Non-tidal Waters (Mission Bridge to Hope Bridge)

Open the in-river recreational sockeye fishery:

- three days after 95% of the Early Stuart sockeye run has passed Mission;
- in-river FN FSC open times are not being constrained (i.e. 72 hour set nets) OR in-river commercial/economic fisheries are planned;
- a harvestable surplus for recreational/commercial fisheries is expected.

Close the in-river recreational sockeye fisheries when:

- a) below the confluence with the Sumas River:
 - it appears that conservation and FN FSC needs will not be met for any management aggregate present and abundance of that aggregate is greater than 10% of total abundance in marine waters; or
 - the allowable exploitation rate on Cultus or Late run sockeye is achieved.
- b) above the confluence with the Sumas River:
 - it appears that conservation and First Nations FSC needs will not be met for any management aggregate present and abundance of that aggregate is greater than 10% of total abundance in marine waters.
 - the allowable exploitation rate on Lates is achieved,
 - on the Interior Fraser River coho closure window date (early September).

Note: If abundance of the aggregate is less than 10% of the abundance in those waters and if the following aggregate is expected to meet conservation and FSC needs, the fishery would remain open.

Recommendation:

Implement the proposed decision guidelines noted above for opening and closing recreational Fraser River sockeye fisheries:

Pros

- Provides clarity and transparency to decision making process regarding opening/closing 2006 recreational Fraser sockeye fisheries.
- Provides benefits to tourism component of recreational fishery by providing increased certainty regarding fishing opportunities.
- Resource managers will have time to consult on these proposed decision guidelines.

Cons

- First Nations will likely not agree with the recommendations due to the recent Douglas court decision.
- Decision rules may not provide managers with sufficient latitude to deal with unforeseen circumstances.
- May have unintended consequence of extending FN FSC fisheries in the lower Fraser in years when communal licence harvest target has been met or exceeded, there are no sales agreements and the recreational fishery is still open based on the decision rules.

Next Steps:

Negotiate and implement decision rules for opening and closing Fraser sockeye fisheries in advance of the 2006 sockeye season.

Prepare consultation package for First Nations and Commercial sector. Meet with these sectors.