

**Submission to Cohen Commission
Campbell River Public Forum
August 25, 2010**

Dear Commissioner,

I am speaking to you today as a member of BC's nature based tourism industry. Nature based tourism is a major driver for our local economies. More than 1.2 million tourists spend approximately \$1.5 billion dollars on nature-based tourism every year in British Columbia and the sector supports some 26,000 jobs not including the tourism supply services (hotels, restaurants, transportation, etc) that nature based tourism supports. These figures also do not capture the significant recreational sport fishing industry nor the growing First Nations cultural tourism. In addition, our nature based tourism industry is the main driver of all tourism in BC, which in total is represents \$13.8 billion and 132,000 direct jobs.

Nature based tourism is by nature an industry based on environmental protection and conservation. The products, services and experiences we sell are founded in our natural assets, and environmental quality so it behooves us to have a negative impact on these factors. As such my industry colleagues go to great lengths to protect our environment and to be environmental stewards. So our industry finds it very problematic when the practices of other resource industries have a negative (sometimes debilitating) impact on our environment and on key species like sockeye salmon.

Tourism on BC's coast and throughout the Fraser River Watershed is very much dependent on salmon resources. This annual celebration of nature and the complex ecosystem that it supports provides exceptional opportunities for fishing, wildlife viewing, nature study and photography, and associated recreation. Wild salmon supports our world famous sport fishery and is a mainstay on menus in our restaurants and cafés. We also depend on wild salmon for feeding all the wildlife that people come to see, such as the bears, whales, seals, and eagles, and nurturing the majestic forests of BC. Many people may relate bear viewing, for example, to coastal areas, however just as important are the Sockeye Salmon spawning areas in BC's interior (e.g. the headwaters of Quesnel Lake).

However, our salmon are in a crisis in particular the Fraser River sockeye, which is of course why we are here today. Yes, the sockeye returns this year have been pretty good. However, if un-checked, another collapse like 2009 could put an end to this key species. Management is lacking at best, and we are at the whim of nature. But at the same time we seem to be doing everything in our power to challenge nature, thereby reducing its resilience.

According to the commission rules for public forums and submissions we are asked not to lay blame. However it is hard not to point a finger at what we believe to be the key suspects for the collapse of the Fraser River Sockeye. We suspect that many wild salmon populations have been threatened because of habitat destruction from logging and possibly mining. We also suspect that wild salmon have been threatened by over-fishing and urban pollution. However, Mr. Commissioner, I am speaking to you today because we strongly believe that the Fraser River

sockeye, as well as other salmon species, (and the future of our tourism industry) are being directly threatened by the current management practices of the BC salmon farming industry, and with the support of our governments.

The independent, published science indicating significant impact in BC's salmon stocks including Fraser River sockeye due to sea lice and viruses like IHN generated by open net-cage fish farming, along with similar evidence from around the world where salmon farms exist, gives a clear warning to BC's nature based tourism industry as it should for the general population and this commission.

Our industry has organized visits to areas where fish farms operate including the Broughton Archipelago, Clayoquot Sound and more recently Discovery Islands to view the sampling of juvenile wild salmon before and after they encounter fish farm sites. We have witnessed first hand how sea lice propagated by the fish farms in the area have infected the juvenile wild salmon. Fish farms are causing a deadly collision between the vulnerable juvenile wild salmon, and sea lice and viruses propagated on fish farms. These smolts are not equipped to survive these impacts, and independent research is proving that they don't.

Government cannot escape blame in this crisis. Every action taken by government, either federal or provincial, suggests that their focus and commitment is to promote and enable the aquaculture industry with little regard for wild species. In fact DFO's predominant efforts to promote the aquaculture industry appears to have a direct conflict with its mandate to protect wild fisheries. At times it would appear to the sinister that government would just as soon be rid of wild salmon so they can no longer interfere with all kinds of development pressures. For our part, we feel that the federal and provincial governments are essentially supporting and actively promoting one industry at the expense of another - tourism.

The fish farm industry and government will 'go to the wall' to deny the industry's impact on wild species including sockeye salmon. However, at the same time they are putting significant resources into Slice and other options to control the spread of lice thereby acknowledging the risk their industry poses on wild salmon. There is some indication that the fish farm industry is now, finally, looking at closed containment technology as a way to control their impacts on the environment. We believe that closed containment is the only permanent solution to mitigate and or control the impacts on Fraser River sockeye (and other species of salmon), and needs to be embraced by all stakeholders in this issue. I believe my colleague Brian Gunn will expand on fish farm impacts and management solutions later in this forum.

The impacts that the current management practices of the open net-cage fish farming industry will have on wild salmon will be damming and irreversible. Key species like sockeye salmon and the very icons that make up Super Natural BC and support our \$1.5 billion local, made in BC nature based tourism industry will be lost forever. I urge you to consider the impacts that the fish farming industry is having on wild salmon and include strong mitigation measures in your final recommendations.

Evan Loveless, Wilderness Tourism Association
Cumberland, BC