

Cohen Commission Presentation – Gary Coons Sept 1, 2010

One good year does not mean a comeback.....last year forecasts were 11 million ...only 1 million returned....this year an 11 million forecast ...and 36 million appear.

This strange turn of events only stresses the importance of a strategic provincial plan...with the necessary science and data to ensure sustainability for our coastal communities.....this not only for Fraser sockeye but for all salmon species.

What is required to secure the future of Fraser sockeye?

The decline of salmon stocks is probably the result of many intermingling factors ...which may be ocean conditions changing due to climate change , severe water quality issues, habitat loss in our provincial watersheds and the impact of open net fish farms with migrating juvenile sockeye. But who really knows? What is importantis who should know!!!!

If there is something for the commission to realize in this year's bizarre Fraser River sockeye run, it's that there are significant gaps in our knowledge. ...especially in the knowledge of those tasked to manage a resource that is critical to coastal communities.

Many people out there accuse mismanagement by DFO and their inability to effectively manage and protect salmon, DFO's lack of sufficient baseline research for such protection and their ineffective management regime seems to be high on the list.

I believe that DFO is too centralized and that regional staff need the autonomy and flexibility to make decisions that make sense locally, decisions that can respond to fluctuations and changes.

For example ...because of area based licensing restrictions ...people who had almost no opportunity to fish up north this year ...COULD NOT fish the lucrative Fraser run!!

There seems to be a lack of transparency at DFO for management decisions up and down the coast ...for example

- How are harvesting rates determined?
 - Who benefits ...who loses?
 - How can we rebuild depressed runs and when?
- Are those responsible for our wild stocks implementing the WILD Salmon Policies?

As the panel analyses the Department of Fisheries and Oceans policies and practices, they must be guided by a simple principlethe health and wealth of salmon communities is our collective responsibility and must be one of the highest priorities. The continued success and wellness of Fraser River sockeye and all salmon on the coast is a precondition to a sustainable fishery.

There must be a management system that can accurately forecast how many fish can be taken without harming future returns. To do this we need the necessary research data and science.

I read that the proceedings from the Summit on Fraser River Sockeye ...March 2010 ...it stated that:

"There is a need to increase Canadian research and action on the marine coastal environment and on climate impacts.

Specifically, the following four research activities are vital to address critical knowledge gaps regarding the declining productivity problem.

First, there is a need to assemble and analyze all existing data on Fraser River sockeye health and condition.

Second, we need to compile historical data on the abundance and health of farmed salmon along the sockeye migration route

Third, programs to assess timing and survival of migrating juvenile salmon should be expanded at various locations in the Fraser and in the coastal marine environment.

Finally, we need to understand why some populations and species are doing better than others, including links to climate change."

I see that the Commission has established 12 research projects dealing with some of the issues the think tank suggested ...I strongly believe that this is a whole coastal problem; every river system needs resources to ensure sustainability.....not just the Fraser River!

I also think that the commission should address the funding shortfalls for watershed and stewardship groups to implement the Wild Salmon Policy, and scrutinize DFO's stock assessment budgets to ensure the necessary funding to adequately monitor wild salmon stocks throughout BC.

The Think Tank specifically mentions the WILD Salmon Policy...

"Climate change poses a major threat to the future of Fraser River salmon, not only through direct effects of temperature on the fish, but also through impacts on food webs and habitats. Management agencies must take this information into account in order to meet the objectives of Canada's Wild

Salmon Policy, which include maintaining biodiversity as well as monitoring and protecting habitat.

These are clearly challenging times for Fraser River sockeye salmon. The scientists in the Think Tank are confident that taking the appropriate research initiatives and management actions immediately will improve the prospects for these fish and their ecosystems, to the benefit of the many people who depend upon them."

I do have to question why this commission has not mentioned or cited the WSP in their documentation or Terms of Reference.

How can Fraser sockeye be effectively harvested?

I agree with CARL WALTERS, UBC Fisheries professor and ex-member of the scientific advisory panel of the Cohen Commission....who is now calling for larger quotas than the 30,000 sockeye currently granted to licensed commercial fishing vessels. He says that DFO must move from the fixed escapement policy into a harvesting mode much higher than they currently are. He states
"They're sticking with the same policy even though the data don't support doing so."

The Alaska Dept of Fish and Game's Salmon management model is when I believe should be in the panel's research activities. It focuses on one thing escapement.

From the Globe and Mail ...Gary Mason Aug 31...

"In Alaska, the forecast for any given salmon run is merely a starting point. As soon as the fish begin returning to inland waterways, the Dept starts to collect data on their numbers and the forecast almost goes out the window.

How much of a particular run gets harvested depends on how confident officials are about reaching their escapement targets. But hitting those numbers is paramount, which is how you guarantee the long-term survival of the species.

But Alaska has become very good at two things: getting an accurate count of escapement numbers as the run returns and adjusting the harvest accordingly. (Its forecast numbers are generally far more accurate than DFO's as well). The Dept. has area management biologists who have the authority to open, close or modify openings in a particular fishing area based on the best information they have.

If we're ahead of our escapement numbers we'll open things up, if we're behind we'll shut 'em down,...It's a constantly moving target. We issue literally hundreds

of emergency orders modifying harvest numbers based on the continuous assessment of the run. And can do so on a moment's notice."

What is my vision for the sustainability?

To have an integrated and cohesive strategic plan that would answer, in a comprehensive fashion, the challenges facing the fisheries. It would have all community stakeholders at the table.

It would include a stabilization program to enable fisherman and communities to ride out the tough times to ensure the necessary infrastructure for the industry is there when needed (similar to lobster fisherman on the east coast).

It would promote conservation and the maintenance of healthy stocks of all marine species while retaining or developing sustainable commercial fisheries that contribute to the sustainability of marine communities.

I believe we must look at all marine fisheries and develop a plan that will:

- enable working fishermen to make a good living;**
- increase salmon runs through wild stock conservation, habitat restoration and regional salmon development;**
- assist marine fishermen to gain access to a sustainable number of all salmon species;**
- develop locally controlled monitoring, compliance and traceability systems for all fisheries;**
- gain access to other species of fish at a reasonable cost; AND**
- make the fishery desirable to the next generation.**