

September 29th, Chilliwack
Cohen Commission Public Forum

My name is Elena Edwards and I reside in Mission. I resigned from my job as a Care Aide in a Special Care Unit to work full time on ensuring that wild salmon have a future along with traditional First Nation culture. There is no financial compensation for this work.

Your Honor, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the very difficult task ahead of you, and that there will be no easy solution. The reality of what it would take to ensure a healthy future for wild salmon would mean going up against something that is bigger than all of us.

There is a quote by Upton Sinclair that comes to mind on a daily basis. It is this; "A man cannot understand something so long as his job depends on him not understanding." That the economy has become so dependent on the exploitation of the natural world and that jobs have become a priority over a living healthy planet has become far too apparent. That the words "healthy economy" are uttered more than "healthy environment" is telling.

A good friend of mine took Zygmund Baumun's line that "People will go quietly and meekly into a gas chamber if only you allow them to believe it's a shower" and gave it a different perspective, changing it to, "People will go quietly and meekly to the end of the world if only you allow them to believe that salmon don't matter." Having attended most of these public forums and heard many people speak up for wild salmon, and having been part of a gathering of over 5000 people in Victoria this past May for wild salmon, it is a relief to me to know that people are not willing to go quietly and meekly to the end of the world, but rather are willing to give their all to protect what matters.

So what would it take to ensure a healthy future for Fraser River Sockeye? Perhaps one could start by looking at the reasons why the Fraser River is fourth on the endangered rivers in B.C. list. From sewage

to industrial agriculture and development, reduced protection for urban stream tributaries, rapid urbanization, urban run off, transportation corridors, extensive logging in the headwaters, heavy industrial pollution along the north arm, gravel extraction gone wrong, and the average citizen who thinks nothing of dumping bleach down the drain. I imagine I would be pretty upset if someone came to my home and contaminated it the way the river has been contaminated. If you were to join us on the paddle for wild salmon this October, you would see with your own eyes the difference from Hope to Vancouver. You would see how the river side goes from beautiful healthy forest and ecosystems to gaping holes in the side of Sumas Mountain, industrial development that gradually increases as you reach the city. The river and the salmon pay the price for such industry.

I had a long conversation with someone from DFO about the salmon. I asked him, “What if there was a policy in place that used salmon as a measuring stick as to whether or not certain practices could be used?” “Like what?” he said. “Well, what if this policy meant that in order for someone to develop, they would have to do so with zero impact on salmon habitat? What if all existing practices that harm salmon had to cease? That means logging practices, industrial development, agricultural practices, road expansions, gravel extraction, mining, would all have to ensure that their plans had zero impact on salmon. No compromise. How would that change things?” His response was to laugh. He said there will always have to be compromise to habitat, or it would be impossible for industry to operate. That was a very damning comment. We have compromised one of the mightiest rivers in B.C. and with it the habitat of salmon and so much more. Are we going to compromise wild salmon to death?

I witnessed one such example of unnecessary compromise at a council meeting in Mission, where a request was put forth by developers to change the Riparian Area Regulation from 30 meters to 15 in an area where it's a miracle that salmon come back to spawn at all, given that a dam built in the early 1900's all but killed the Stave River salmon run.

At the urging of the Mayor, all council voted in favor of the developer, despite the lack of research on the environmental impact of this change. It's bad enough that the development in question is being planned on an Island right in the midst of a sensitive ecosystem where salmon spawn, but that municipal council then has the power to compromise such habitat with little more than the lifting of a hand is unacceptable. Such accounts can be heard in every municipality. We should be very concerned that the voices of those who speak up on behalf of salmon habitat fall on deaf ears nine times out of ten.

When over 5000 people gathered in Victoria this past May, there was little recognition that so many people were asking for wild salmon to be a priority, and not fish farms.

You will no doubt be hearing a lot about fish farms in the months to come. You've already heard them mentioned at virtually every public forum. You've already heard about the very real concerns of diseases and unnatural levels of sea lice, and the resistance to SLICE. I'd like to add two very basic facts; 1) Atlantic Salmon do not belong in Pacific waters. Period. Wild Pacific salmon do.

And 2) As we have seen with the avian bird flu, with the swine flu and with any historical account of a species being crammed into close quarters for long periods of time, disease spreads in such conditions and the farmed salmon are no exception. It should not require years of scientific study to figure this out. It's pretty basic.

Fish farms should never have been introduced to begin with. Let's get them out immediately. Mother Nature gave us wild salmon that come to us freely and feed an entire ecosystem and culture. Industrial greed gave us fish farms that feed the pockets of Norwegian shareholders. Which one do you want to protect?

I was recently part of a tour up the Fraser River that was organized with the intent of exploring ways that different interest groups fishing on the river could get along. This tour was organized in large part as a result of

Chief Willie Charlie of Chehalis getting shot in the face by a recreational fisherman last August. The amount of racism toward First Nation is an issue surrounding fishing that very much ties into this inquiry and the roles of DFO. I've heard one too many accounts of DFO assaulting First Nation people for illegal possession of salmon. Consider that; illegal for a people whose culture has always been linked to salmon to be in possession of salmon unless given the okay by gun toting DFO officers. It's concerning how much hatred is directed from sports fishermen, who fish for sport mind you, towards the Indigenous who fish to feed their families. Is this a result of there not being enough fish to go around? This needs to change.

As for sustainable harvesting practices, what comes to mind is a First Nation story I heard many years ago, in which a man went fishing by the river and saw that there were many salmon and he thanked the spirit, cast his net, and pulled many salmon onto the shore. Looking back at the river he saw that there were still many salmon, and he thought how he could feed his family and neighbors well over the winter, so he cast his net again, and again brought in many salmon. Still, he saw many salmon in the river, and now he thought there is still plenty. I will throw my net once more. And the third time he pulled in his net he saw that it was full of branches and stones. He looked to the shore and saw that where the salmon had been, now there were just twigs and rubble. The moral of the story should be obvious; don't take more than you need.

This Friday, Oct.1st an event will be held in Mission called "In Praise of Wild Salmon". Alexandra Morton, Chief Marilyn Baptiste, Rex Weyler, Ernie Crey, and many other wild salmon advocates will be there to celebrate this year's return of the salmon and to announce that we mean to ensure that wild salmon are a priority. I'd like to invite you, and everyone else who cares about wild salmon to be part of this evening.