



Area “ A “ Crab Association

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Submission to the Cohen Judicial Inquiry

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From: Dan Edwards
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My understanding of this inquiry is that it is supposed to explore the reasons for the decline of the Fraser River Sockeye Fishery. Of course this includes an exploration of the loss of fish that were predicted to come back in 2009 but it also must look at the reason why, in years when they also got more fish back than expected, that the fishery was still massively mis-managed, to the point that some long time fishing fleets of Fraser Sockeye received absolutely no access to the most abundant run in 100 years. I have had long personal and political experience with this fishery and there is a very close connection to the decline of this fishery and the overall dysfunction of the management of fisheries in B.C.

In 1999, there was a major collapse of the Fraser River Fishery. Returns were so low that no fisheries were allowed. At the time the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, through one of its employees, Wayne Seito, stated that it was a natural disaster, that something occurred in the ocean environment that had destroyed stocks and they had no idea what it was. In response to this statement, a large caucus of First Nation, industry, and coastal community people worked together to lobby the government of the day, both federal and provincial to enact Natural Disaster legislation. At about the same time this legislation had been used to help farmers whose maple trees were destroyed in an ice storm and the New Brunswick aquaculture industry had received it for a disease outbreak in their farms. We thought we had a good case.

The department for years had pursued a two river policy, and had enacted licensing policies to deliberately destroy the mobile coastwide small boat fleet. This made the fleet more and more vulnerable to collapses in either the Skeena or the Fraser and with most other fishing opportunities either abandoned or allowed to be destroyed by other resource users, the

unprecedented collapse of the fishery in 1999 caused extreme hardship in the fishing community. Both the provincial and Federal government refused to enact Disaster Relief funding and after two months of lobbying, in extreme frustration, I started a hunger strike with my daughter and Vivian Narcisse. We called it off after eight days when Minister Dhaliwahl stated that he would reconsider our issues. When this turned out to be an empty promise I restarted the hunger strike on my own and it lasted fifty nine days. I ended it when I met with the Minister of Fisheries and he promised he would do an independent review of the consultative process in the B.C. fishery.

This review took four months to start and was heavily influenced by the department despite the promise for an independent review. Stephen Owen was hired to run this process. Although he quite halfway through to enter politics the review was completed and 49 recommendations for change were put forward to government. The IDR(Institute for Dispute Resolution) was very clear that these recommendations were not to be cherry picked but had to be enacted in total to effective.

The department of Fisheries and Oceans ignored them for two years and then took ones they knew they could manipulate and acted on them, basically creating a number of advisory bodies that could be easily manipulated or ignored, whichever suited the bureaucracy at the time. Major recommendations, such as the development of an independent allocation board or an overarching policy forum were completely ignored. This was cherry picking at its worst. In an attempt to develop a better process for consultation, one that would be adaptive, would be democratic and respect the health of the fishery and the First Nations , instead we ended up with a bastardized advisory process that allowed the department to continue to drive the commercial fishery into oblivion.

While this was happening at the coast wide level, a number of us were organizing with the communities and First Nations on the west coast of Vancouver Island to build a regional management board. One of the major issues we first engaged in was the access issues for the trollers and communities of the west coast of Vancouver Island to continued access of Fraser River sockeye. This board was put into place under the Oceans Act in 2001 in an attempt to protect the interests of the fishermen and the communities of the west coast. A former DFO manager told me two years ago that as soon as the board was put in place the central DFO office in Vancouver vowed to destroy it. They felt it was going to work against their ability to control the management of the fishery and the allocation issues. It is no accident but it is a terrible tragedy that when the biggest run of Fraser sockeye in the last hundred years came back, that these communities were totally cut out of the fishery despite all those years of trying to protect our right to access those fish.

The major problem with the fishery and here I am talking about the entire fishery in Canada, is that it continues to be run by political and bureaucratic edict, every attempt to develop comprehensive planning that respects the ability of all users to fairly access the resource through a proper consultative process has been rejected by the bureaucracy at every turn.

I am here today as the executive director of the Area A Crab Association out of Prince Rupert. You might ask what the connection is between the Fraser fishery and the northern crab fishery. A few days ago, we were given a letter by Sue Farlinger, the RDG, where she states that

embedded within a crab reform process is the very real possibility of re-allocation to the sports fleet. This re-allocation will occur by piecing off each small crab area and allowing recommendations from the SFAB to be developed in these balkanized areas. This would be re-allocation to a fleet that has no monitoring, catch statistics or effective enforcement oversight. The commercial crab industry, mirroring the recommendations to the salmon industry, had asked for a de-politicized, principle driven balanced allocation process underpinned by science and responsible management. As in salmon, this recommendation has been completely ignored by the Pacific region. As long as the bureaucracy runs the fishery in order to satisfy short term political interests, the fishery will continue to be run into the ground. That is a certainty. Along with a two river policy Pacific region has been driven by a policy of destroying the flexible small boat fleet, allowing corporate consolidation, and monopolization of the industry despite national economic policies that are supposed to protect us from these kinds of undemocratic and anti-free market structures.

I live in Ucluelet on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. I respectfully ask that the Cohen inquiry visit the west coast of Vancouver Island in order to find why after years of accessing Fraser sockeye when they were abundant, in this most abundant of runs, the Department of Fisheries did not have the capacity to make sure that this fleet was able to access their share of this run, for an economic loss of several million dollars. This is an example of massive mismanagement coupled with a deliberate decision within the bureaucracy to destroy the economic viability of the commercial industry because of the following political pressures: sports fishing interests wanting a larger and larger share of the pie without a recognized compensation mechanism or allocation process; upriver First Nations wanting to cut out ocean fisheries in order to get more fish back to their territories; a sell-out to the Americans who do not want us to catch any of their passing stocks while allowing Alaska to harvest ours, the reason why Minister Anderson got rid of the equity principle in the treaty and appeased American interests; pressure from the environmental community to develop extreme weak stock management that precludes ocean fisheries; and finally government support for net pen reared farmed salmon to be used as a replacement for the wild fishery while it gives in to all these other agendas.

No wonder they do not want to develop and maintain proper consultative processes that would see proper harvesting, care and maintenance of wild fish and the wild fishery. A decision was made just to get rid of it. Imagine their shock and horror when the run comes back in such record numbers that they cannot just manage it into oblivion, except of course for the Area G troll fleet on the west coast of Vancouver Island, which they did without conscience.

This year, from the perspective of the fishing industry, proves that our hopes for the future have not been misguided and should not be abandoned, that we can have healthy returns of salmon and other sea resources and a sustainable small boat fishery based in our adjacent communities. We have never given up on this vision and continue to invest time and energy to make this possible.

Fisheries management is not only about the fish, it is about the principles and objectives of harvest when it occurs. We need to know why, who and how such an absurd decision could have been made this year and those responsible must be made accountable to the losses incurred in the west coast region. The unaccountable contradictory policies, mismanagement of opportunities highlighted by this years re-allocation of Fraser sockeye is a snapshot of all our other fisheries,

and the recent crab reform process now about to be implemented by the department is just one more replication of the same absurd decision making process that led to this terrible situation. Recommendation: That the Cohen inquiry support eco-system based integrated management of sea resources as legislated in the Oceans Act based on sound science and principle driven allocation processes that respect the principles of sustainable development, including the equity principle which states that there be no re-allocation without compensation.