

THE FUTURE OF B.C. COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING

**Conference held via Zoom
Jan. 21 9am-3pm and 22 9am-3:30pm**

Hosted by: UFAWU-Unifor, Northern Trollers Association, Area D Gillnet Association, Area G Trollers, Area C Harvest Committee, Native Brotherhood B.C., Native Fishing Association, Northern Native Fishing Corp., Commercial Fishing Caucus and others.

Facilitated by: Ecotrust Canada with support from UFAWU, T Buck Suzuki and many others.

Attention salmon harvesters:

The commercial salmon fleet can no longer make a decent living.

The purpose of this conference is to put together a series of recommendations for the government regarding what needs to be done in order to rebuild a viable and vibrant commercial salmon fishery.

To accomplish this, we must figure out how to best coexist with other sectors while keeping reconciliation in mind as we draft recommendations.

As there are so few commercial fishermen, it is essential that we keep and develop allies in all coastal communities to support commercial fishing.

However, most of all, active commercial fishermen and our organizations need to put differences aside and unite around a program that rebuilds a vibrant and sustainable salmon fishery.

1) Improving Salmon Runs

Discussion question:

- ***Increasing salmon available for harvest can be accomplished in at least two main ways: produce more or increase survival/reduce threats. What do you see as the best opportunities to increase salmon available for harvest?***

Increasing salmon runs must be the government's and all salmon fishermen's priority. There are all kinds of potential for the commercial salmon fleet to have a great future if everyone cooperates to increase salmon numbers.

Across the 10 breakout groups, fishermen found six areas that, if addressed, would improve the size and health of salmon runs:

Produce more salmon:

- i. **Salmon Habitat** – Protection, identification, restoration and enhancement.

- ii. **Hatchery production** – Increase production from hatcheries. Especially interesting was Alaska Style Fishermen – Community Regional Salmon Development (RSD).

Increase survival/Reduce threats:

- iii. **Pinniped Populations** – Reduce and ongoing control.
- iv. **Salmon Farms** – Decommissioning marine based salmon farms.
- v. **International interceptions** – US and high seas fisheries.
- vi. **Increased science** – From stock assessment through to habitat research and ocean survivals; from predators through disease and sea lice to ocean feed increased science is needed in all areas.

Produce more salmon:

- i. **Salmon habitat** – Funding for protection, identification, restoration and data collection needs to be adequate and sustained over the long term and should come from multiple sources, not just the government.

Protection: There is a big need to protect the quantity and quality of salmon habitat and water resources. This must apply to small streams and large rivers, wetlands, lakes and estuaries. Salmon habitat should be checked on a regular basis, a log kept and should involve First Nations and local residents as they can best monitor and observe impacts. Protection includes industrial pollution (including agriculture, forestry, mining, pipelines and shipping), urban impacts, increased water temperature due to dams, road runoff and deforestation. Habitat that supports or could support salmon needs protection and should be first in competing uses.

Identification: In order to increase wild salmon populations, there was a general agreement that increased funds should be made available to study B.C. watershed for an evaluation of restoration potential and the potential of increased contribution to commercial salmon fisheries. Impacts from climate change such as altered hydrology and water quality from forest fires and drought and past impacts especially from forestry, other industries, urban development, need to be identified.

Restoration: After evaluation, increased and sustained funding needs to be available to restore habitat. First Nations, communities, local residents and other industry workers should be involved in restoration. However, there must be accountability and transparency by the responsible decision makers on priority, project funding, and outcomes.

If the government makes a decision to permit habitat destruction by competing uses, it must be a deliberate decision that is documented and the negative salmon impacts researched and either replaced through habitat development on the system or hatcheries and the spawning requirements adjusted accordingly.

Enhancement: Barriers to increased egg deposition and juvenile rearing areas need to be removed where possible to enhance spawner success and the number and health of juveniles. Habitats should be enhanced by such methods as increasing back channels, wetland areas, spawning channels, fish ladders and lake fertilization. The resulting increase in wild salmon from the enhanced habitat should be used to improve salmon fisheries.

- ii. **Hatchery production** – policies to increase salmon hatchery production for harvest by the commercial fishery are essential if the commercial fleet is to survive.

Hatcheries: Commercial fishermen support DFO's Salmon Enhancement Program including Community Economic Development Projects and First Nations managed hatcheries, whether rebuilding stocks with conservation concerns or producing salmon for harvest. The last hatcheries were brought on line in the 1980s and hatchery production has since decreased substantially. Commercial fishermen would like to see that trend reversed. In recent years, salmon from Kitimat, Snootli, McLaughlin Bay, Conuma, Nitinat and Barkley Sound hatcheries have provided much of the commercial salmon harvest.

Hatcheries were initially brought in to replace lost habitat and increase fishing opportunities.

Ocean feed studies: Hatcheries in Alaska, Russia and Japan have been so successful that some scientists believe that there are too many salmon in the ocean. Other scientists do not believe that to be true. DFO should work with international fisheries agencies to reach a common opinion.

Alaska-Style Community-Fishermen regional salmon development (RSD): Increases salmon production through fishermen-community hatcheries, which produce salmon for all fisheries (FN, com, rec), reduce pressure on wild stocks, contribute financially to the hatchery program and is done in a sustainable and responsible manner.

Interesting item from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game:

Alaska Private-Non Profit Regional Aquaculture Associations (such as NSSRAA, SSRAA and PWSAC) are regional non-profit fishermen-community groups (funded by a self-imposed tax and by a cost-recovery fishery) who release salmon to sea from an area where fishing can happen on returning adults with minimal impacts on wild stocks. The Alaskan government passed special legislation in the 1970s to allow the associations to operate salmon hatcheries to rehabilitate the state's depressed salmon fisheries. Around one-third of Alaska commercial salmon catch at a value of over \$120,000,000 comes from these operations. Hatchery production in Alaska is designed to supplement — not replace — wild stock production. With the introduction of the hatchery program, both wild stocks and commercial salmon harvests have increased in size.

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=775
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingHatcheriesOtherInfo.reports>

Regional salmon development (RSD): B.C. Community-Fishermen RSD is supported by most salmon fishermen as long as it acts responsibly. Fishermen recommended that our governments follow Alaska's lead. We do not need to reinvent the wheel, Alaska has had many years to create a very successful program. Alaskan hatchery releases are located in similar places to many of our coastal hatcheries — on short streams in areas where the hatchery surpluses can be fully harvested in commercial fisheries.

Most fishermen were willing to help fund the hatcheries by supporting a policy of hatcheries taking some of the production to cover hatchery costs (cost recovery fisheries) or by direct "royalty-style" payments. Fishermen supported smaller hatcheries releasing a variety of species, spread out coast-wide in areas where mixed stock problems would not occur. Where hatchery infrastructure is not being fully used, fishermen would encourage increased hatchery production that could be released in carefully located remote release sites. Increased hatchery production and remote releases could increase employment in remote communities by contracting nearby First Nations to look after the facilities and juvenile salmon in their area. Unused salmon farm facilities could be used to increase hatchery production.

Community-based regional organizations of all user groups were preferred so that there is broad-based support and salmon are produced for all users (First Nations, sports, commercial). The fish produced would be a common-property fish — in that no one would own the fish privately. Once wild stocks increase in numbers the hatchery releases can be dialled back, if necessary, for biological reasons.

Discussions should take place with First Nations, and commercial communities and recreational fishermen to gather support and to institute a pilot project based on the Alaskan program.

Increase survival/Reduce threats:

- iii. **Pinniped populations** – Science and fishermen's observations agree that pinniped populations have exploded and seal and sea lion populations coast-wide need to be reduced if salmon, steelhead and fishermen are going to prosper.

First Nations harvests/Pinniped IFMP: First Nations harvests for FSC or commercial purposes and a Pinniped IFMP are supported to bring pinnipeds into historical balance. A pinniped harvest should be substantial and a 50 per cent reduction in their population would not be out of order, particularly in estuaries. Pinniped growth is a coast-wide issue, and the reduction should be done in all areas of the coast where they are identified eating juvenile salmon (especially the larger spring, coho, sockeye smolts and steelhead parr) and returning adults. This is not just a salmon predation issue; predation on herring is also an issue as herring are a salmon food source and an important fishery for many salmon fishermen. DFO needs to support both Pacific Balance Marine Management Inc.'s submission of its Marine Management Plan and the Pacific Balance Pinniped Society.

There is an increasing body of scientific evidence that shows that without pinniped control, salmon and steelhead will be driven down to such small numbers that they will not support any fisheries. The joint DFO/Provincial Thompson and Chilcotin Recovery

Potential Report conclude that a reduction in seal population by 50 per cent is necessary for steelhead recovery. Steelhead recovery is linked to the fall south coast commercial chum fisheries which are enduring a rolling closure in order to reduce steelhead impacts to zero.

Although politically unpopular, pinniped control is of immediate importance.

- iv. **Salmon Farms:** The Conference opened with a presentation from Bob Chamberlain about how a coalition of First Nations, commercial fishermen, communities and conservation groups were able to push to change something that almost no-one thought possible.

Fishermen at the conference applauded both the Province and the Federal governments who have now adopted policies decommissioning some marine-based salmon farms — because coalitions backed by good science demanded change. Fishermen agreed that all salmon farms need to be removed from juvenile or adult migration routes and be shore-based or closed containment, well away from any salmon migrating, feeding or rearing areas.

As the commercial salmon and other fisheries improve, processing capacity utilized for farmed fish can be shifted to processing commercially caught fish. Communities can move from relying on farmed salmon as an economic driver to commercial fisheries and hatcheries producing salmon for commercial, First Nations, and recreational fisheries.

More studies are needed to identify threats and ways to increase the salmon survival rates and returns, including ocean feed issues.

- v. **International interceptions:** U.S. and high seas fisheries are increasing their harvests of Canadian salmon.

The US harvests Canadian salmon while Canadian fisheries are closed down on the same runs and, at the same time, Canadian harvests of US-bound salmon are decreasing. A disproportion of aggregate Canadian stocks is harvested in Washington and Alaska. The Pacific Salmon Treaty should be renegotiated to reduce American fisheries on Canadian salmon and to increase Canadian catches of American salmon so that interception equity is established. DFO needs to allow fishing in areas where Canadian fleets can intercept US-bound salmon.

High seas harvests of salmon are increasing. Canada needs to work with other nations to eliminate high seas fisheries that catch salmon and to enforce any existing treaties.

- vi. **Increased Science:** All areas need increased science; it is the overarching theme in how to improve salmon runs.

There needs to be more money invested in water protection, hydrology and habitat restoration priorities and solutions. Increased and sustained funding to hire more charter patrolmen and fisheries guardians for stream walking to do habitat documentation and stock assessment — juvenile and spawner enumerations. Science needs to determine what factors produce great runs on similar water systems and the optimal spawning levels for maximum sustained harvests (maximum sustained value).

A robust system should be set up for each fishery, FSC, commercial, recreational, inland and marine to collect accurate catch data. Data on juvenile success from freshwater to estuary and inshore marine survivals needs to be increased.

2) Allocation of the Resource

Discussion question:

- *How should salmon be allocated between user groups (conservation, FSC, commercial/ EO and recreation) to ensure all user groups can coexist?*

Stable and accessible allocations are necessary for a successful future for all sectors. The fishery is fully subscribed yet every sector has a right to exist and make a fair livelihood. Part of this is to protect what salmon we have, improve habitat to create more salmon and to increase hatchery production — as allocations and a fair living are easier to achieve on growing harvests.

In discussion, fishermen developed four themes that would create equitable sharing arrangements to allow for reconciliation with First Nations and supportive co-existence between sectors:

- Monitoring compliance** – Good data is a must to ensure fair and enforceable allocations
- Priority** – Conservation first then FSC fisheries have priority. Other than that, there should be no priority fisheries, just allocations or allocation agreements.

Commercial/First Nation economic opportunity (EO) fisheries – all commercial fisheries should have equal priority

Sports/Commercial – There should be no sports priority.

- Numerical TAC, percentage, round tables or a combination of all three allocation solutions:**

Total allowable catch (TAC) based allocations – a TAC based on preseason numbers.

Percentage – a set percentage either coast-wide or by region/area.

Round tables or local committees – work well in smaller fishing areas. Expansion of local committees to determine local allocation.

- Compensation** – Must be fair and not take advantage of fishermen's desperation.
- Reconciliation** – Is the overarching principle and needs to be kept uppermost in mind.

Interesting item from DFO policy branch:

SAP: The Allocation Policy of 1999 (<https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/240366.pdf>) which gave sports fishermen priority access to coho and chinook and 95 per cent of pinks, chum and sockeye to commercial fishermen is now up for review. It is called the Salmon Allocation Policy (SAP) Review and DFO says it will set out fishing priorities between First Nations, commercial and recreational sectors. SAP will not deal with allocation between gillnet, seine and troll.

i. **Monitoring and Compliance**

Accurate numbers: Accurate catch and escapement numbers from all fisheries are necessary to establish run size (which is determined by catch mortality and escapement) and allocations.

Right now, the commercial fleet has the most stringent monitoring and catch reporting system which has, in many cases, insupportable costs, especially with small harvests. Catch monitoring rules must make sense for each fishery; no fishery can be un-monitored, and data collected must be equally robust for all fisheries, and catch monitoring costs cannot drive fisheries from the water; all fisheries must be accountable for their catch.

Third-party monitoring: If third-party monitoring is required for one sector it should be required for all fisheries, including all marine and fresh commercial and recreational fisheries. Catches must be reported and verified in a timely manner to aid management decisions.

Harvest rules: Harvest rules must be part of the allocation agreement so that each group can access its allocation; allocations must be harvestable, not paper allocations. Bycatch needs to be shared fairly so every sector can catch its allocation.

ii. **Priority**

Conservation: The first priority. Conservation levels need to be mutually agreed to, cannot be used as a weapon to reallocate fish, and any closures for conservation purposes should apply equally to all fisheries.

Food, Social, Ceremonial fisheries: Commercial fishermen agree that after Conservation is met, that FSC fisheries are the next priority. However, they should have good data collection and monitoring. FSC salmon should not be sold or that changes that fish, in allocation and priority, to commercial fish.

All other fisheries: At the conference, most fishermen were in agreement that priority was not a good way to allocate salmon between any other fisheries. Priority allocation left an open-ended amount of fish to be caught; the allocation was dependent on effort and catchability, which left the sectors with a lower priority no certainty of access.

First Nations economic opportunities: EO fisheries should have the same priority as all other commercial fisheries. It was generally supported that, if possible, marine EO fisheries should take place in conjunction with commercial fisheries in the same areas and at the same time in order to eliminate “us and them” thinking. Fishing at the same

time is especially important when time and area limit access due to run timing or conservation issues.

Recreational Fisheries: Fishermen differentiated between “mom and pop” recreational fisheries, non-resident access, and commercial guided ventures. Guided ventures are recreational-commercial operations. Non-residents should be guided and their allocation should be limited as compared to access by British Columbians.

Recreational fisheries cannot have priority over commercial fisheries. If there is any priority, “mom and pop” fisheries should have priority over recreational-commercial fisheries. Some fishermen proposed that counting stations should be established to ensure accurate catch data.

iii. **Fishermen preferred three other methods of allocation either separately or in a combination**

TAC allocations: this is based on a pre-season allocation but requires a good pre-season run size estimate, which fishermen believe is difficult to get.

Percentage allocations: This is similar to the US Boldt-style allocation — a fixed percentage for First Nations, to be shared between First Nations, a fixed allocation for regular commercial fisheries (excluding OE) and a fixed allocation for all recreation fisheries. A coast-wide percentage-based allocation would ensure certainty for each sector. Fishermen would like to more thoroughly look at the Boldt Decision to see the intricacies and if and how it could be adapted to B.C.

The percentage allocation also encourages all users to work together to conserve and grow the stocks as that increases the pool for everyone.

Round Tables: These are Committees that have representation from all commercial gear and all other fishing sectors (First Nations and recreational) that work together to arrive at cross-sector plans. This was by far the preferred option to develop allocations between sectors. Fishermen recommended that DFO work with fishermen and other sectors to develop local and regional processes to deal with salmon allocation. These tables should include a broad-based advisory structure supported by science. All fish harvesters need a voice at the table. Fishermen demonstrated support for localized enforcement and accountability between user groups

Fishermen agreed that we need to reconcile everybody’s needs and a good principle to respect is that everyone has a right to a fair livelihood. Sectors have to have transparency and inform others of the priorities of their fisheries. We need to bring those as close together as we possibly can in timeframes and numbers and manage in a way that gives access to fair fisheries for each fleet.

It was acknowledged that it might be difficult to create large regional (e.g. north-south) or coast-wide round tables — round tables were seen to be most effective at a local level.

Combinations: The percentage allocation between sectors had the largest support for a coast-wide allocation process but the local processes were considered better from many points of view – transparency, accountability, monitoring/data collection, conservation

and enhancement opportunities. It was difficult to envision a process that would have coast-wide percentage allocations and local allocations but it was also acknowledged that there had to be some kind of division everyone thought was fair both coast-wide and locally.

Major river systems/Upriver fisheries: It was acknowledged that determining round table allocations plans with up-river fisheries and ESSR fisheries was more difficult than marine.

- iv. **Compensation:** Fishermen strongly felt that there had to be fair compensation for re-allocations to other sectors from the commercial sector. The present lowest bid policy is very unfair and not supported. If there is increased allocation to First Nations for reconciliation, individual fishermen should not be footing the bill by being forced to sell at a desperate number.

The buying of capacity (licences) that have not been actively fishing is not compensating active fishermen; allocation is taken from active fishermen while non-active is compensated.

DFO must be more transparent about re-allocations. A percentage or TAC is easier to follow but re-allocation based on priority is impossible to determine compensation. Fishermen think it is only fair to be compensated for lost opportunities due to re-allocations.

To be viable, the commercial fleet cannot be reduced to numbers that are so small that the required infrastructure to support commercial fishermen disappears (eg. gear stores, net floats, lockers, boat shops). Food production and food security are important to all Canadians.

- v. **Reconciliation:** Reconciliation is a delicate process, we are working in the same industry with the same goals, we need to make a functional thing out of the fishing industry. We have more in common than not. We should all be able to fish. We need to find a forum where we can all work together. Reconciliation is a two-sided term, everyone gets along, and everyone can do what the other can do.

3) Access To The Resource

Discussion question:

- *There are many policies that stop fishermen from accessing their allocation, what do you think they are and how do you think could be changed?*

Fishermen developed three broad themes regarding access:

Fisheries Planning and Access

- i. **Decision making by local fisheries managers**
- ii. **Round tables**

Opportunities to fish

iii. **Test fishery policies and access**

iv. **Weak stock management**

Science, Politics and Access

v. **Science**

vi. **Other Access Issues**

Fisheries Planning and Access

- i. **Decision making by local Fisheries Managers:** Decisions made in Ottawa or at B.C. Region to open or close a commercial fishery is usually made without intimate knowledge of the area. Fishermen agreed that local managers should have more autonomy; that local managers usually understand the salmon return patterns, tides, rainfall and other local things affecting a fishery. Local managers should be given the flexibility and authority to immediately respond to changes in return sizes; presently they close fishing on short notice but to open or extend requires the approval of B.C. Region or Ottawa. Managers need to respect how time-sensitive the salmon fishery is.
- ii. **Round tables:** Many fishermen thought round tables should make the pre-season fishing plans and that the fishing plans should be premised on each group being able to access (harvest) their entire allocation. In-season round table committees should work with each other and DFO managers to make sure the fishery is managed to ensure that run sizes, timing, catchability and other in-season factors are being taken into consideration when opportunities are being made for each group.

There is a difference between DFO consulting groups then coming up with a fishing plan and local committees (round tables) creating fishing plans. DFO is influenced by political objectives that may not be present in the local area. Local round tables are tasked with “negotiating” fishing plans — and their objective is that all get enough access to harvest their allocation. The Integrated Harvest Planning Committee process does not work because people just pick apart the other sectors instead of jointly planning a fishery.

Interesting information:

- The Wild Salmon Policy governs the escapement goals and harvest rates. DFO is presently updating this policy (<https://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/salmon-saumon/wsp-pss/ip-pmo/index-eng.html>).

Presently, this policy requires DFO to consult with commercial fishermen and others before setting management targets for stocks or groups of stocks.

- For 67 years, from 1951-2018, the coast-wide combined pink, chum and sockeye returns, measured in pounds, remained virtually the same. Even though the total returns stayed the same by weight, in the 1990s DFO deliberately reduced the *commercial* salmon catch by 72 per cent. As a direct result, the value of the commercial salmon harvest dropped from \$404 million to \$52 million. In the last two years, the value of the total B.C. salmon catch was less than \$15 million.
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Opportunities to fish — It was universally acknowledged that opportunities to fish have declined and many times it was not a lack of fish it was another set of policies or governmental priorities that were stopping fisheries. Overall examination of all policies, wherever access is hampered by policy, is strongly recommended.

- iii. **Test fishery policies and access** In many areas, fishermen are unable to access the full length of the run and so are fishing not on all stocks on an aggregate basis but only on the stocks at the end of the run. In many cases the fisheries begin after escapement is nearly achieved; designed ESSR (Escapement Surplus to Spawning Requirements) fisheries now occur on a regular basis.

Fishermen recommend a test fishery program that is designed to spread the commercial harvest over the whole of the run. It should be designed with local knowledge, using “outside” test fisheries where possible; a one-day full fleet assessment fishery can provide a good look at what is returning — with a low harvest rate. FSC openings can also give good and reliable data. As a general rule, salmon should be fished across the whole time period of the return as a part of an aggregate; not always on the last part of the run after the escapement has been reached or nearly reached.

Fishermen also think that a general policy of opening as many areas as possible at the same time and allowing fishermen to make a choice where to fish will divide the fleet up and reduce impacts on any one system. If run sizes are too small, fishermen can devise other fish tactics such as pool fisheries or trading with other sectors as long as the options are discussed with the fleets ahead of time and supported by active fishermen.

- iv. **Weak stock management:** Although DFO avoids the term “weak stock management,” fishermen agree that that is how most fisheries are being managed. DFO is holding the marine fleet to a harvest rate that will keep the most unproductive (weak) stocks at MSY levels which means that the stronger stocks are underfished. It is evident in many areas, DFO has created fishing plans that are intended to reallocate salmon from marine fisheries to inland fisheries. Allocations should not be created in that manner. They need to be done transparently and as part of a deliberate and open allocation agreement. There is nothing wrong, from a stock conservation point of view, to have some stocks maintained at low returns.

Unproductive stocks can be kept at low but stable levels in order to provide more opportunities for productive stocks. “Sustainability directives” should replace conservation policies designed to maximize the growth of non-productive stocks. Habitat assessment and salmon enhancement should be the primary measures used to increase individual salmon stocks, not fishery curtailment.

Science, Politics and Access

- v. **Science:** All science is not treated equally. Many times, fishermen see partial sections of science reports used as a weapon against the commercial fishery. Other sections are ignored. Below we offer a few examples to back up this statement:

DFO ignores the science which says that chinook are being driven down by the still-increasing pinniped population (Nelson, Walters, Trites and McAllister). Policies do not acknowledge the science that says that salmon consumption by marine mammals has more than compensated for reductions in fisheries harvest from 1975 to 2015 (Chasco, Kaplan Thomas et al). In spite of these studies, and instead of supporting the commercial fishery and reducing pinniped numbers, commercial fishermen face increasing closures on chinook salmon.

The same situation occurred with the joint Provincial and Federal CSAS report on Thompson and Chilcotin Steelhead (Korman, Bison, Decker), which said that a fifty percent reduction in seals would allow the steelhead populations to increase, while a reduction in the commercial impacts to zero would maintain the steelhead at the low and concerning present stock size. The commercial fishery was closed.

The Independent Science Report on the Skeena (Walters, Lichatowich, Peterman, Reynolds) which said that if the present harvest policies were continued no stock would be extirpated but many would remain at low but stable levels. It said that if all stocks were to be rebuilt to MSY, the commercial harvests would have to be cut in half. It recommended a round table of harvest sectors to meet and determine a socially acceptable level. Instead, DFO unilaterally decided to cut commercial marine harvests on the Skeena River by 50 per cent.

Little work has been done to see if the decision to reduce commercial marine harvests on sockeye in Rivers, Smiths, Skeena or Fraser has been beneficial or if that policy has created problems due to density dependence and delayed density dependence (Walters).

Rockfish Conservation Area and Marine Parks are two more concerns. There are reports that show little impact on rebuilding stocks but large impacts on commercial fisheries.

Fishermen recommend that science not be used for political expediency to solve difficult political issues. Instead, science should give advice on how to benefit salmon and other species while at the same time supporting commercial fisheries. The above issues should be reassessed on that basis.

- vi. **Other Access Issues:** There are also a number of indirect policies that impact fishery access: Fishing licence price, and monitoring costs. Unresolved land claims are creating an access issue. We have to discuss with upriver First Nations about our ability to deliver fish upriver.
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4) Governance

Discussion questions:

- *Governance is the process of making decisions: who has authority (decision-makers), who is included, and who is accountable. What ideas do you have for strengthening the governance of salmon fisheries?*
- *What kind of a structure would work for commercial fishermen so they may continue to communicate and work together with real-time political weight?*

There is a governance crisis in salmon today. Fishermen, fisheries managers and scientists put together annual fishing plans that are totally ignored. There is no transparency nor any clear explanation. Economic Opportunity agreements are signed mid-season that close the commercial fishery one day without any warning and open the EO fishery the next day. This is disrespectful of those that earn their living in the fishery.

There must be transparency and accountability in this public fishery. Decisions are opaque, key knowledge holders are being ignored, stakeholders are at a loss to explain decisions, the salmon and the fisheries are collapsing, hundreds of millions of dollars are being lost annually. The current decision-making system is failing and government is struggling to meet the demands of competing interests. A set of priorities has been created that is not public to satisfy a set of internal rules that again are not public, that are supposed to manage a public fishery. Instead, they are collapsing our fishery. If the salmon fishery is to survive, the entire decision-making system must be restructured.

Fishermen talked about governance and governments throughout all topics. But in this workshop, fishermen concentrated on how to improve the present governance structures:

- i. **Provincial government**
- ii. **DFO's relationship with active fishermen**
- iii. **DFO advisory bodies**
- iv. **DFO management process**
- v. **Round tables**
- vi. **Commercial fishermen**

- i. **Provincial government:** The province needs to be involved in fisheries matters as how goes the fishery so goes the coastal communities.
- ii. **DFO's relationship with active fishermen:** Fishermen are in absolute agreement that there is no relationship between active fishermen and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Fishermen say that DFO makes decisions based on politics, DFO is not accountable, recommendations are not listened to and are not taken into consideration.

Fishermen feel that the government of Canada makes decisions in “back rooms” with political orders coming down from Ottawa. Decisions made by the government do not reflect the needs of commercial fishermen and instead are made for the Party's own political gains by pandering to the most politically advantageous group. Some fisher harvesters feel that B.C. needs a deputy fisheries minister to be appointed.

Decisions are shrouded in confidentiality. Fishermen do not have any idea why decisions were made and DFO seems blind to the fact that they are responsible to commercial fishermen and that their decisions can ruin fishermen's ability to make a living. A simple management question in 2020 became very controversial — becoming a protected decision through cabinet confidentiality. This refusal to be transparent is a great issue throughout the fleet.

Fishermen recommend that to repair their confidence in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans that when fishermen ask a question, DFO must answer thoroughly, and if asked, clarify their decisions. Get rid of political interference and get back to scientific management, based on research, and not decisions based on the political climate.

- iii. **DFO Advisory bodies:** The current advisory bodies in salmon are elected by licence holders, most of whom, according to DFO's figures (next topic below) are not even fishing. Fishermen recommend that advisory committees should be made up of active working fisherman, not just licence holders. This will help make decision-making and governance more relevant and equitable, particularly when discussing allocation, access and licensing issues. Fishermen take the position that decision-making or advisory bodies regarding the interests of fishermen should not be for corporations and buyers, but for active fishermen.
- iv. **DFO management process:** Fishermen recommend that there should be an Industry-wide review for all user groups for governance, via town hall roundtables and a structural review for existing advisory boards around mandates, terms of reference and equitable decisions. Find a way to make decisions accountable, fishermen have concerns regarding misinterpretation by government or not implementing what was heard by local fisherman

The existing governance structures such as the IHPC, the CSAB, and the SFAB, are primarily focused on harvest while DFO says its primary directive is Conservation first. A suggestion would be to review the existing governance to be bifocal to include both conservation and harvest.

The government should not be excluding fishermen from any discussions regarding fishing plans. Canada was told by courts that the interest of stakeholders needs to be at the table but there has been no inclusion of stakeholders in many of the processes taking place regarding fisheries matters.

Decentralize the management process. Decisions need to be more at the local level by managers who are involved with the fishery “on grounds.” Local management work should be with

advisory groups in collaboration with First Nation fisheries managers and the harvesters make decisions together instead of Ottawa or Vancouver deciding how a local fishery should be managed.

The present system is too cumbersome to get fishery openings, for example, In the Fraser, there are approximately 40 different desks that must agree for fisheries to open in the Fraser commercially. Just the time process of getting that to happen is days, and the fish are gone by the time it opens.

- v. **Round tables:** There are all kinds of ways to develop co-management where the final authority rests with DFO, and round tables, if there is a real dialogue between DFO and the round table group, have been proven to work well.

An open, inclusive and transparent process is required. Governance structures that are adaptive, transparent, and inclusive must engage stakeholders in meaningful ways. Transparency has to include principles of engagement and interest-based negotiation and commitment to fair livelihood. It is not good enough for the government to make decisions that hurt and hinder fisheries without consequence.

Fishermen recommend that round tables should be at a local area level where they have been shown to succeed, however, they could be tried in larger and more complex areas.

Round tables need to be open and inclusive of the stakeholder sectors in the area (FSC, EO, commercial and recreational fisheries must be at the table) and they need to make timely recommendations in a transparent way. Round table participants need to be informed by science and up-to-date stock assessment. Communications should go out to all stakeholders and must be thorough and timely.

Timing of meetings and in-season decisions and communications need to take into account the realities of the fishing season for all sectors at the table.

Fishermen recommend that decisions be made at the table. There is no point going into a round table process only to find that others have more political influence to change the outcome of the group table. This will render rebound tables useless.

Round tables should also have the ability to make last minute opening decisions.

Round tables should be consensus-seeking, meaning they need to be seeking recommendations that all stakeholders can live with. If no consensus can be reached then there needs to be pre-arranged consequence and accountability — issues cannot simply be ignored.

Interesting regulatory information:

All Atlantic Provinces have legislation that requires fishermen in a specific area or specific fishery to join an active fishermen's organization — each province is a bit different — but belonging to a fishermen's organization gives active fishermen a voice.

Nova Scotia: https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/61st_3rd/3rd_read/b098.htm

New Brunswick: <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/nb110707.pdf>

Newfoundland: <https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/f18.htm>

Prince Edward Island:

https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/c-02-1-certified_fisheries_organizations_support_act.pdf

- vi. **Commercial Fishermen governance:** Better organizational structures must be built to show more unity between fleets, to work together and to have more political weight. At present, commercial fishermen do not have the organization and resources to successfully promote commercial positions and communicate with the public and government.

We need science-based and industry consensus building to have more influence over political decision-making. Harvester organizations could work with their own biologists to support their positions and add to our local knowledge. DFO should provide money to harvester groups to develop their own science-based knowledge to combine with local knowledge.

Some fishermen believe that there are too many fishing groups — both Indigenous & non-Indigenous. Everyone's needs must be met and, at times, decisions do not happen to avoid upsetting anyone. Fishermen need unity of Indigenous & non-Indigenous fishermen and require Indigenous & non-Indigenous leadership.

Fishermen have to develop leadership within their own organizations and we need to examine how an alliance of all our groups could work together to form a strong united voice. We need to rebuild the strength of organizations such as UFAWU and the Native Brotherhood. Broad representation is important but speaking with one voice is what will foster change. Fracturing in industry equals weakness. Unity is strength. We can work together and there are great benefits to doing so.

Fishermen said that they have to push hard for collaborative governance and decision-making. When it's collaborative it becomes much more transparent. We want salmon to be collaboratively governed. As commercial stakeholders, we want to be part of that. Everyone needs to be on the same page and everyone is fully informed and can make informed decisions. DFO won't respond unless it's a collaborative informed movement.

Industry groups could meet together without DFO, prior to formal advisory committee meetings, to develop a united front on management.

5) Licensing: Entry And Exit Plans

Discussion questions:

- *What would a licensing policy look like that protects active fishermen, enables retirement for those that don't want to fish anymore, and encourages new entrants?*
- *How do we allow fishermen that want out to transition into a comfortable and secure retirement?*

Interesting facts:

All fishermen require a licence to legally catch and sell fish in Canada. licences are issued by the federal government (DFO). In the Pacific, we have limited entry to try to ensure that all harvesters attain at least a moderate livelihood (Davis Plan). Unlike Atlantic Canada’s inshore fishery, licences in the Pacific can be owned and controlled by processors, investors and other non-fishermen.

Number of licences vs number of licences that fished:

SALMON LICENSES		ACTIVE LICENSES			
		2019		2020	
	TOTAL	DFO			Estimate
GN	1387	56%	776	22%	300
TR	376	63%	236	40%	150
SN	276	36%	99	12%	34

Norway and other Scandinavian countries have pension plans for fishermen so they have a guaranteed pension upon retiring.

<https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=no&u=https://www.garantikassen.no/samordning/category913.html&prev=search>

Fishermen think that if their recommendations are followed and further developed in fishermen’s meetings, that there will be a commercial salmon fishery in the future that people will want to be a part of and choose as one of a basket of fisheries. Many fishermen talked about the superiority of the pre-1990 licensing system where fishermen paid for one licence, the A licence, which held a vast array of fishery privileges on a coast-wide basis.

Fishermen agreed, if done properly, that retiring fishermen and new entrants were complimentary — like two sides of the same coin. If you support young people to get in, you are also supporting people retiring.

Across the breakout groups, there was agreement on the general ideas but more time and discussion was needed to fill in the details. Fishermen supported the following plan:

- i. **Made in B.C. owner-operator and fleet separation policies**
- ii. **Exit Plans**

- Buy Back
- Concurrent Initiatives – Estate Planning
- Concurrent Initiatives - Community-Fishermen licence Bank
- Concurrent initiatives - Severance

Concurrent initiatives – Pension
Buyback Funding - Licences
Buyback Funding - Vessels

- iii. **licence Bank**
- iv. **Entry Plans New Entrants-Young Fishermen**
- v. **Licence issues: Married, stacked and length restrictions**

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- i. **Made in B.C. owner-operator and fleet separation practices:** Fishermen were adamant that investment corporations, processors, or fish buyers should not own licences and that fishermen should own and operate their own licences. Fishermen agreed the value of fishery needs to remain in the hands of active fishermen and that licencing is the right or privilege to participate in the fishery. No corporations should be able to buy licences/quota in B.C. Without fleet separation and owner-operator, fishermen risk having their licences owned offshore.

A made-in-B.C. owner-operator set of regulations that reflected the needs of B.C. fishermen was advocated. Fishermen wanted to look at other areas with owner-operator systems and examine in a public way, engaged with all user groups, how to build a B.C. owner-operator fleet.

There was little to no support for switching to transferable quotas — not for individuals or as gear groups.

In order to implement an owner-operator system in the salmon fleet, companies who owned boats and licences would have to sell them to the buy-back or to individual fishermen over a set time period. A number of ways were suggested:

- Move to owner-operator, using the 5-5-5 rule (like the dairy quota). If you're out of the industry for five years, you must get rid of the licence. If it's quota, then it's 1/5 for every year. We want to drive the licences into the hands of those that are fishing. We need to get processors out of ownership of access (fleet separation).
- Move to owner-operator, and make it affordable for new entrants by giving the new entrant the incentive of being able to write down the cost of the licence in their taxes until they exhaust it. After all the write-downs against the original cost, it will make it affordable to a new owner-operator. Has to be sold as an Owner Operator Licence going forward.
- Transition to owner-operator will be a long-term process and not something that will or should happen overnight. There needs to be measures and supports for young people to get into the industry; something along the lines of support provided to the Agriculture industry.

- ii. **Exit Plans**

Fishermen warned: The idea propagated is that less effort will add to the financial viability of those who remain. It sounds right but it has not worked that way. In reality, it

makes fishermen less politically influential because there are fewer people in the industry to fight for commercial fishermen. We need to keep that in mind when making Exit Plans.

Buyback: Fishermen strongly felt that a buyback was necessary for the dual purposes of allowing those who want to retire from the salmon fishery to sell out and to ensure that there are licences that new entrants — those who want, or will want in the future— to buy-in. There is a need to compensate fishermen at fair and reasonable prices structured to benefit the people who are giving the licences up.

At the end of any buy-back, the allocation must remain with the fleet. A retirement buyback cannot be used for salmon reallocation purposes. A buyback needs to take into consideration gear, area and community to ensure that ocean-based communities have ocean-based industry.

Concurrent initiatives/Estate planning: However, although a buyback was supported, fishermen are also concerned that as licences are destroyed the incentive to improve the fishery and support future fishermen and communities is also destroyed. It is important to fishermen that retired licences stay in the community and/or family and transition to owner-operator. If licences stay there the jobs stay there.

A recommendation is that in conjunction with the buyback, the federal and provincial governments create innovative ways for succession and estate planning, keeping the licence/vessel in the community or family and providing an opportunity for the younger generation.

Concurrent initiatives/Community-fishermen licence bank: There was very strong support for community-fishermen licence banks. An example of a similar licence bank is the Northern Native Fishing Corporation. The details of a licence bank are in the section below.

A recommendation is that in conjunction with the buyback and licence retirement, a good proportion of the licences that are bought out are placed in a community-fishermen-controlled licence bank where they can be parked until the salmon stocks increase. This way, all coastal communities can receive employment benefits from increased salmon numbers.

Concurrent initiatives/Severance: A severance package was recommended for non-licence holders leaving the industry — so many thousands of dollars per year of service. Skippers and deckhands should not be left on shore without a job, especially if the licence is sold in a buyback. They should have part of this severance paid for by the company who they delivered to and part from the government.

Concurrent initiatives/Pension: It was recommended that the government investigate what a special fishermen's pension plan would cost to be developed for future fishermen (in addition to CPP). Fishermen would contribute and the fish buyers would contribute, contribution rates set by statute or by B.C. industry standards. This way, a future fisherman would not have to rely on his boat and licence as a future "retirement package."

Buyback funding/Licences: There should be enough money to allow retirees to transition into a comfortable secure retirement. Fishermen did not come up with a way to value a licence for the buyback program except that there should not be a “reverse bid system” as has been used for PICFI licences, so that the most desperate sell out at unreasonably low prices.

Buyback funding/Vessels: It was also felt that there should be a boat buyback plan to help fishermen sell their vessels and regain some money for their investments and to prevent vessels from becoming derelict. One idea was that the government should not directly buy the boats — instead the fisherman vessel owner would get a monetary contribution from the government for selling their boat to incentivize sales instead of leaving the vessel rotting at the dock. This would provide a less expensive yet environmentally safe option.

Fishermen also remarked that when they sold their licences they would have to pay tax on the sale price. Fishermen may lose half of that revenue from the sale of the licence to taxes. Fishermen recommended that there should be some deferral process over a number of years so they can retire with dignity.

iii. **Licence bank:** Protects active fishermen, enables retirement and encourages new entrants.

Fishermen strongly supported the principle that exceptions can be made in a made-in-B.C. owner-operator policy to include community-fishermen licence banks.

Fishermen agree that all salmon licences that are bought up in a buyback should not be retired because, if licences are gone from the industry, then they will never be put back into play — you could lose an equity fleet and potential jobs in the future. Employment in all fisheries is already in the extreme low end of that spectrum, and with few boats and little employment, there is less and less dock space for fishermen, fewer ice facilities and less commercial infrastructure altogether.

With a community-fishermen licence bank, licences would remain in a community and supply future employment opportunities when the salmon runs are rebuilt. Fishermen envision a licence bank to be launched with government buy-back licences and start-up funding but the bank would become a self-sustaining, non-profit entity. Internal licence rules would be developed by a board elected by active salmon fishermen and communities including lease and purchase criteria for active and new entrant fishermen, so young fishermen or others can lease or purchase at a reasonable rate. It would provide a future option for retiring fishermen to sell their licence, and possibly their boat, to the bank. A licence bank operates as a market “float” — as the salmon runs increase, demand goes up and more licences are leased or sold and, if the runs decrease for a time, demand would go down and fewer licences would be leased, providing a lower fishing effort.

Fishermen see owner-operators and licence banks as complimentary.

iv. **Entry Plans - new entrants, young fishermen:** Fishermen recommend encouraging and incentivizing new entrants with an owner-operator model. For young fishermen to be successful, low-interest loans and funding for vessel modifications are important, as are training and other support from the government.

A great example of a good program is the Young Fisherman's Development Act in the USA which provides funding for training and small loans for young fishermen and funding for licensing.

Licence banks would provide access to low-cost leases and owner-operator provisions would ensure licences remained affordable.

v. **Licence issues: Married, stacked and length**

Married licences: It was generally agreed married licences should be able to be split and sold separately.

Salmon Area licence stacking: Salmon licence stacking was more complex as it included whether fishermen should return to coast-wide licensing or if troll and gillnet have a north and south area like seines, or if the present areas remain as are.

Many fishermen called for a review of area licensing. If licence areas were combined, the question would be how a fisherman with more than one salmon licence should be compensated for the combination of areas. One suggestion was to write down the cost of the other licences in taxes until they exhaust the cost.

Length restriction: It was generally agreed that licence length restrictions should be removed. However, there was a discussion on compensation for those who had invested in a second or third salmon licence and paid for increased vessel length.

“Licences should not be a tradable commodity! The huge monetary value on licences nowadays makes it unaffordable for young people to get in. Before this whole value thing, you just needed a personal licence to get in. Take the capitalization out of this process! It's preventing growth and the future of the fishery when young people can't get in.”