



Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council

Conseil pour la conservation des ressources halieutiques du pacifique

COMMUNIQUE

December 16, 2004, Vancouver – The commercial salmon fishery has undergone significant changes to improve conservation of the salmon resource. Conservation requirements will continue to rise given the need to protect weak stocks, the requirements of the US-Canada Salmon Treaty, legislation recently passed to protect endangered species and greater public scrutiny of the fishery, suggests a new report commissioned by the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC).

“As a major user of the salmon resource, the commercial fishing fleet is often the first to be blamed for diminished stocks, but the reality is that the factors influencing salmon stocks are very complex. This report provides valuable context on the evolution of the province’s salmon fishery and the challenges it faces,” says the Honourable John A. Fraser, chair of the PFRCC. “The report argues that the high conservation bar set to protect wild salmon and economically viable commercial fisheries are not mutually exclusive.”

Prepared by fisheries industry experts Stuart Nelson and Bruce Turriss, the report, entitled *The Evolution of Commercial Salmon Fisheries in British Columbia*, chronicles changes in the management and operation of the province’s commercial salmon fishery over the past six decades.

Telling the story of three distinct eras, the paper recalls the “good old days” (pre-1950s) when “there was enough fish to satisfy all users” and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the commercial fishing industry worked closely together to achieve the joint objectives of conservation and commercial success. It goes on to outline the long era of growing fishing capacity and increasing controls (1960s-1998) characterized by a relentless build-up in fishing power, the introduction of scientific stock-assessment tools, shrinking DFO resources and increasingly restricted fisheries. The historical account ends with a look at the current management era with its strong conservation mandate.

“The report does much to inform the public of how the fishery has evolved from a large industrial scale to the current smaller, more controlled scale designed to improve salmon conservation. In the future, I would anticipate increasing emphasis on catch control and selective fishing and further modification of commercial fisheries towards a less competitive, more co-operative model to achieve conservation goals while allowing for an economically viable industry,” says PFRCC member and fishing industry expert Murray Chatwin.

Concluding that BC will never return to the large-scale, mixed-stock industrial fisheries that existed in the 1960s-1990s, the report's authors suggest that reducing competition during the conduct of the fishery may be a way for the province's salmon fleet to remain economically viable. Continuing the trend towards a fleet-wide, coast-wide adoption of non-competitive fisheries would allow for more small-scale harvests throughout the migration period, rather than large, intense fisheries near the peak of the run. This control over the amount of salmon harvested is critical to ensuring that fisheries managers can keep catches within allowable limits. The industry would have the opportunity to maximize value rather than volume, and innovation could be directed to improving selective fishing methods in order to protect weak stocks. The fleet has already shown a willingness and ability to harvest selectively.

The PFRCC will be conducting similar reviews of the evolution of recreational and First Nations fisheries in British Columbia.

A full copy of *The Evolution of Commercial Salmon Fisheries in British Columbia* is available at www.fish.bc.ca

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