



COMMUNIQUÉ

Government capacity to manage salmon continues to decline

May 5th, 2005, Vancouver, B.C. – The federal government’s capacity to conserve and scientifically manage the Pacific salmon fisheries continues to be eroded, according to the annual report of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC). This said, the Council notes with optimism, the late December 2004 release of the draft Policy Framework for the Conservation of Pacific Wild Salmon may signal a more strategic approach to fisheries management. This policy and the resources to implement it will be a matter for Council review. The PFRCC is not satisfied the Department will have adequate funding to properly implement the policy.

The report, issued today, notes that Fisheries & Oceans Canada has been focused on dealing with budget cuts when it should be directing its attention towards managing this valuable resource. It questions the government’s capacity to do an effective job in areas of enforcement, habitat protection and restoration, salmon enhancement, research and stock assessment, and also calls for the Department to open its management to public scrutiny about the effectiveness of its choices.

“The Council’s work over the past year found that reductions in assessment budgets and reduced survey coverage of Pacific salmon are occurring at a time when better data are urgently needed for salmon management,” said the Honourable John Fraser, who is retiring as Chair of the Council but who is continuing on as a Member. “This continuing decline in assessment capability will result in the loss of the most tangible and reliable information that is needed for future salmon stock management. Without this information, collected and analyzed, those responsible for salmon management just do not have the data to make informed and competent decisions.”

The findings come largely from the Council’s study last year on increasing conservation risks due to budget and program cuts in Fisheries & Oceans Canada. While acknowledging better spawning results in much of the region, the study found a loss of public confidence in the federal government’s commitment and ability to protect the salmon resource, and called for sustained long-term funding for a core assessment framework and implementation.

The Council’s annual report, at the same time, acknowledges several recent success stories involving government leadership. Among these are the measures taken to recover coho salmon in southern and northern B.C., the success of selective fishing in reducing by-catch, Skeena steelhead recovery and innovative agreements with First Nations to speed the recovery of endangered stocks.

At the provincial level, the Council is encouraged by the recent creation of the Pacific Salmon Forum to address the sustainability of wild and farmed salmon.

Among the annual report's other key findings:

- Community stewardship groups are not adequately supported, have experienced significant declines in government funding sources and must rely more on funds from private sources;
- Social and economic factors must be taken into account in determining the future of salmon enhancement and there is a need for broader and balanced public evaluation of the issues of salmon enhancement and hatcheries;
- There is no evidence to link over-escapement to salmon stock collapse, allaying concerns that salmon stocks could be put at risk if large numbers end up spawning should the government move to more precautionary management; and
- The evolution of commercial fisheries from a large industrial scale to the current smaller, more controlled scale can improve salmon conservation. Further such changes during the conduct of the fishery may be a way for the salmon fleet to remain economically competitive while protecting the stocks from over-exploitation.

Established in 1998, the PFRCC is an independent body with a mandate to report annually on the status of British Columbia's salmon stocks, their habitat and related ecosystems. PFRCC reports advise the public and governments on salmon conservation issues, and provide recommendations with a long-term strategic focus.

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For more information contact:

Gordon Ennis
Managing Director, PFRCC
Tel: 604-775-6070

Michelle Cook
PFRCC Media Liaison
Tel: 604-833-2734