



FIRST NATIONS FISHERIES COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Commissioner Cohen's Final Report and Recommendations Released

The First Nations Fisheries Council welcomes the release of Commissioner Cohen's final report into the decline of sockeye salmon in the Fraser River, and his recommendations on how to improve the future sustainability of sockeye salmon and the fishery.

Commissioner Cohen agreed with many of the concerns raised by the First Nations Coalition during the Inquiry, including concerns about the recent changes to the Fisheries Act and CEAA, which dangerously shift DFO's focus away from fish habitat, biodiversity, and ecosystem based management. The report emphasizes DFO's responsibility to immediately implement the Wild Salmon Policy and the Habitat Policy as an important means of saving wild salmon.

The report calls for DFO to take seriously its constitutional responsibility to effectively manage and conserve wild salmon stocks and protect salmon habitat. The Commissioner made strong recommendations on the importance of stock assessment, ecosystem based management, and transparency in DFO's management processes. The Commissioner agreed with First Nations that the cause of the decline of Fraser sockeye salmon arose from cumulative impacts over the entire migratory route. He expressed serious concerns with salmon farms, particularly those located along the migration route of juvenile salmon.

The report sets out 75 recommendations with concrete timelines for implementation. A number of key research priorities are identified, including a number of aquaculture concerns such as siting, contaminants, and interaction of farmed salmon and wild stocks; the report states that this research must be completed immediately, and prior to further expansion of the aquaculture industry. One of Commissioner Cohen's critical recommendations was that the mandate for promoting the aquaculture industry should be moved from DFO to another executive branch of government because it conflicts with DFO's mandate to conserve wild salmon. We are grateful for these strong timelines and call for increased government accountability.

We are pleased that Commissioner Cohen has urged the federal government to implement the Wild Salmon Policy, which acknowledges that First Nations have rights and responsibilities in the management of salmon in our traditional territories. He also stated that DFO's funding commitment to the Wild Salmon Policy must include funding support for aboriginal Tier 1 processes. The First Nations Fisheries Council and our First Nations Coalition partners are eager to work with DFO to implement Commissioner Cohen's recommendations.

The report is good for wild salmon, so it is good for First Nations.

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