



December 2, 2020

Darren Chow - North Coast Recreational Fisheries Coordinator (*via email*)

B.C. FEDERATION OF DRIFT FISHERS REPORT TO THE NORTH COAST SFAB

The BCFDF participated in the meetings toward a potential comprehensive revision of the SFAB structure toward developing a new Operating Model which could better represent current challenges and concerns. We are particularly interested in further understanding the new Topic Based Working Groups including a Non Tidal Anadromous Working Group which could better represent non tidal salmon and steelhead concerns.

We remain optimistic the new model will be forthcoming, inclusive and result in better management of our in-river stocks and fishing opportunities; and we remain committed to the SFAB process.

SFAB Comments on the SAP DRAFT Terms of Reference

The BCFDF participated in a cursory review of the draft Terms of Reference for the Pacific Salmon Allocation Policy (the Policy). There appears to be a lot of work yet to be completed towards maintaining fair inclusion of the Public Fishery. The world has changed and the Policy clearly needs to be brought up to date in a way that takes into account the various intricacies of the current fishery and the level of management required to meet these various demands and objectives, while not losing sight of the “overarching principle” / “primary objective” of any Allocation Policy – which is conservation.

There are many challenges faced by all who depend on the Pacific salmon resource for their sustenance, livelihood, and recreation; and within that space the SFAB represents recreational fishing interests to FOC on areas of concern to the recreational fishing community. Any changes to the Policy should encourage selective fishing that reduces impacts on stocks or species of interest. The fact that 20 years after implementing the Policy there is still no scientific understanding of what is causing the decline in fisheries returns, lends itself to the application of the precautionary principle for all stakeholders.

North Coast Fisheries

Similar to many other groups we were thankful for the opportunity to fish this past season and experienced fishing and harvesting opportunities within a number of fisheries.

A highlight in the Skeena this year was the return of an estimated 1 million sockeye which was higher than the pre-season estimate. Based on results from the Tye test fishery the preliminary run size

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estimates ranged from 900,000 – 1,300,000 Sockeye (with 80% certainty). This resulted in portions of the Skeena River being opened to recreational fishing with a limit of two Sockeye per day.

Chinook salmon fishing had an early pre-season fishery until May 19, 2020 after which it was closed until July 15, 2020 and remained open until August 14, 2020. The Skeena River watershed had a daily limit of two per day, with only one of which could be over 65 cm in certain sections. Between high water events, this provided an opportunity for many within the Public Fishery.

Coho had a reduced daily limit to two Coho salmon, only one of which can be over 50 cm, in the Skeena River watershed. Coho numbers appear to be down in many of the tributaries with many anglers reporting lower than normal observation and catches.

Steelhead stocks in virtually all areas of BC are at extreme conservation concern with many at point of functional extinction. It would appear that that the primary tool to save BC steelhead in the Fraser and Skeena systems will be carefully controlled selective fisheries for all sectors. Some progress particularly initiated by the sectors toward selective fisheries is on-going. Until those initiatives become functional remains the responsibility of both provincial and federal governments to provide safeguards against extinction of these BC icons.

Fraser River Sport Fishing Alliance (FRSA)

The BCFDF was instrumental in establishing the FRSA as an advocacy voice for the Fraser River Public Fishery. The FRSA is an alliance of angling organizations dedicated to defending the rights of Fraser River anglers. It is the intent of the FRSA to work with all other consultation processes (including SFAB) toward protecting Public Fishery opportunities on the Fraser River and ensuring this Canadian heritage is preserved for future generations.

The past two summers has seen zero Public Fishery salmon fishing openings on the Fraser despite numerous FSC opportunities; and retention recreational fisheries at the mouth of the river. It is worth noting C&P staff seized 300 illegal nets during the salmon season.

We do not dispute FSC constitutional priorities or opportunities for tidal recreational openings and hope that in-river fishing opportunities continue to be provided to our Skeena counter-parts where it can be demonstrated that an impact can be avoided through alternate methods. Through collaborative discussions we should be able to demonstrate the ability to fish selectively and avoid stocks of concern.

Our hope is we don't see the North Coast go the same as the Fraser and look forward to discussions on how the Public Fishery can continue to share in a collaborative and inclusive fishery for generations to come.

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Closing

We thank our members in the North Coast for their tireless effort and participation in the various processes, boards and committees; as well as activities they participate within the community from charring Public Fishery meetings to feeding fry at the local hatchery and catching broodstock for the continuation and enjoyment of the species. This is underpinned by a continued unwavering effort to keep Public Fishers on the water. In Version 1 of the Policy, it stated plainly that the fishery is a common resource and that it is up to FOC to manage it for “everyone” including “future generations” This statement confirms FOC owes a fiduciary duty toward stakeholders and rights holders.

In practice, FOC delegates the work via the Fisheries Advisory Boards and Commissions, which is a practical approach to ensure involvement of stakeholders and rights holders. Tough conversations and reflections are yet to come.

There are challenges being faced by all who depend on the Pacific salmon resource for their sustenance, livelihood, and recreation. As a stakeholder to the new policy, we hope our voice is heard.

Yours Truly,

Larry Proteau and Jason Harris

BC Federation of Drift Fishers Directors and NCSFAB Members

cc Urs Thomas, North Coast SFAC Chair
Rod Clapton, BC Federation of Drift Fishers

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