

Reprint **Island Tides**

Visit www.islandtides.com to read the current edition and more find more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics in our extensive archive of newspapers and articles.

Reprint from Volume 22 Number 16

Sep 2, 2010

Sockeye inquiry proliferating

Sara Miles

In one year, we seem to have gone from not enough sockeye to too many. Last year's runs were critically low, while this year's user groups are frustrated by low quotas when the run is much larger than expected. Will we ever understand how to manage this fishery? The government is trying to answer this question with the Cohen Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River. The Commission was established by Prime Minister Harper in November 2009 after a public outcry regarding the collapse of last year's Fraser River sockeye salmon runs.

The Commission, whose role includes developing recommendations for improving the future sustainability of the sockeye salmon fishery, is finally getting underway with the majority of its investigation into the reasons for the decline of Fraser River sockeye. Public hearings only recently started; the evidentiary hearings have been delayed; and the Commission just announced several ambitious research projects.

On August 17, the Commission said they determined a need for 12 external research projects 'to help the Commissioner [Honourable Bruce Cohen] understand the science behind the decline of Fraser River sockeye'. The six-scientist Scientific Advisory Panel (now a five-scientist panel, after Brian Riddell's July resignation) recommended the areas of research. It has been decided that a peer review model 'will best serve the commission's science program going forward,' said Brian Wallace, senior commission counsel.

The research projects will include studies of sockeye habitat, diseases and parasites; the effects of human activities, contaminants, salmon farms and predators on the fish; the freshwater and marine ecology, and the status of the fish in these environments. There will also be a review of all published evidence for climate-change and climate-related effects on the sockeye. Other projects will

investigate and evaluate the fisheries management, and analyze the ability of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to meet its stated management objectives relative to Fraser sockeye.

A final research project will synthesize and analyze all the data in the other 11 technical reports.

The researchers, whose names have not yet been published, are expected to provide progress reports by mid-November and final reports by January 31, 2011.

Conservative MP John Cummins is critical of the Commission, saying that the Inquiry's terms of reference 'do not call for a detailed scientific research program'.

Public Input

Meanwhile, public fora are taking place. The first hearing in Lillooet on August 18 had about 100 people in attendance. The other forum locations and dates are: Campbell River (Aug 25); Prince Rupert (Sept 1); Steveston (Sept 13); Victoria (Sept 16); New Westminster (Sept 20); Prince George (Sept 23); Chilliwack (Sept 29); and Kamloops (Oct. 21). Any member of the public who wants to speak at a forum must apply in advance. Application forms are at www.cohencommission.ca. The Commission is asking speakers to consider the following five questions:

- What is your vision for the sustainability of Fraser sockeye?
- What is required to secure the future of Fraser sockeye?
- What are the major habitat issues for Fraser sockeye and how can these be mitigated?
- How can Fraser sockeye be effectively harvested?
- How can citizens participate in the recovery of Fraser sockeye?

Transcripts of all public forums will be listed on the Commission's web site. ☞

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with this attribution, in its entirety, with notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

This article was published (Sep 2, 2010) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 18,000 print copies throughout the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island from Victoria to Campbell River.

Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>