

Briefing Note

Recommendations for Restoring Southern British Columbia's Public Chinook Fishery

- (i) - Transition to Mark Selective Fishing (MSF) for the public fishery during the recovery of wild Chinook stocks of concern;
- (ii) - Utilize strategic enhancement in addition to protecting and restoring critical habitat to reverse Chinook abundance trends; and,
- (iii) - Protect the \$1.1 billion annual public fishery, sustain employment, and maintain the many benefits that accrue to Canada.

Prologue

This briefing note has been prepared by a broad group of concerned southern Vancouver Island citizens.

The group includes local fishing, conservation and advocacy organisations, Sc'ianew First Nation, fishing lodges, charter captains, fishing tackle manufacturers and retailers. It also includes salmon habitat and enhancement volunteers and technicians, plus Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard (DFO) and Provincial biologists.

The purpose of this document is to recommend viable solutions to restore the Chinook resource and protect the socio-economic benefits and jobs related to BC's \$1.1 billion Public Fishery, while the recovery efforts for certain Chinook stocks and Southern Resident Killer Whales are in place.

Anglers by nature are conservationists who recognize the importance of a healthy environment. This has been demonstrated for decades by thousands of volunteers who have devoted hundreds of thousands of hours annually toward salmon habitat and enhancement projects, as well as gifting millions of dollars to the conservation and enhancement of wild Pacific salmon. Endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW's) benefit from efforts to restore weak runs of Upper & Middle Fraser River Chinook. The angling public cares about SRKW wellbeing and supports their recovery.

Currently there is a crisis related to Middle and Upper Fraser Chinook salmon. These large salmon are known as stream-type Chinook, because they spend an additional year in freshwater before migrating to sea. Unfortunately, these runs are experiencing a steady decline due to watershed issues related to human activities and climate change. In the 1990s these Chinook were healthy contributors to coastal and in-river fisheries. Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW's) return to BC waters in the springtime and prey upon these large Chinook salmon whose migration timing coincides with the whale's arrival.

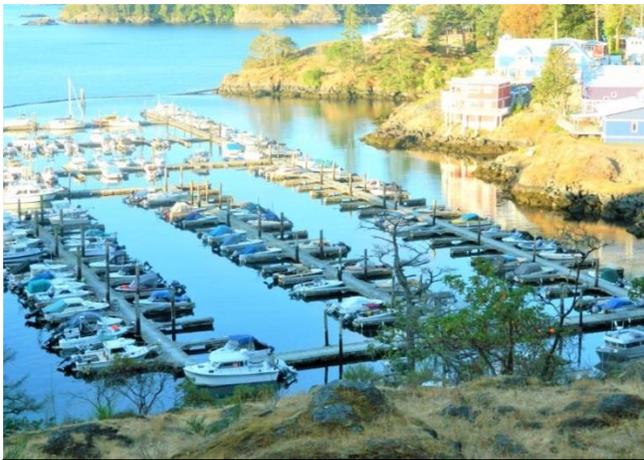
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Over two decades ago, as Fraser stream-type Chinook abundance began to decline, DFO and the Provincial Government failed to respond quickly or effectively. A number of small hatcheries within the Fraser watershed were closed due to financial constraints and poor salmon returns, and there has been minimal enhancement or habitat restoration in the region since then.

Instead of dealing with the issues in the watersheds, DFO relied upon fishery restrictions and closures as the principal recovery tools. These restrictions on the public fishery began in 2008 and increased in intensity, culminating in the current situation where we now have Chinook non-retention fishing over virtually the whole South Coast region during the bulk of the critically important May to mid-September Public fishery season.

This magnitude of seasonal loss of opportunity and the resulting economic hardship, now being realized, are unsustainable for small regional businesses and could have been avoided. The recent move to long periods of Chinook non-retention, when other salmon species are generally not present for retention, has produced estimates of angler participation drop of approximately 90%, which far exceeds the pre-regulation DFO estimate. Public fishery representatives are deeply concerned that the fishery infrastructure could permanently collapse. The angling community predicted this outcome and fore-warned the Fisheries Minister and staff before the April 2019 regulations were announced. Anglers do not launch or moor boats, invest in extensive maintenance costs, spend on other angling necessities or book lodge and guided trip services if they cannot keep a Chinook salmon; **and this has been proven without a doubt during the first two months of Chinook non-retention regulations.**

The quandary for DFO is how to maintain or rebuild wild Chinook stocks of concern during potentially long salmon recovery periods, while simultaneously maintaining opportunity for the public salmon fishery to survive. Chinook non-retention as a fisheries management policy is unsustainable for the public fishery. The result will be continued declines of struggling salmon stocks and the collapse of the Public Chinook fishery that the business infrastructure and support industry cannot endure. It is vital that a viable alternative be instituted immediately. **We strongly support the following action plan for recovery of Chinook stocks of concern and the maintenance of the Public Fishery.**



Comparison of fishing boats moored at Cheanuh Marina on the Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay) First Nation Reserve in East Sooke (Left picture taken Jun 2018 – right picture taken May 2019)

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(i) Transition to Marked Selective Fisheries (MSF) for the Public Fishery During the recovery of Wild Chinook Stocks of Concern:

- **Marked Selective Fishing is a valuable fisheries management tool** that promotes conservation and protection of threatened wild Chinook & Coho stocks while allowing controlled opportunities for anglers to retain “enhanced”, and more abundant, components of the Chinook salmon resource. Chinook MSF must be implemented in Southern British Columbia waters immediately;
- **The current South Coast Chinook non-retention regulations do not permit the public to keep any Chinook** whether they originate from healthy wild or productive hatchery stocks except in a handful of exempted terminal fishing areas.
- **The opportunity to keep a salmon is fundamental to the success of the Public Chinook Fishery.** Under a MSF regime, anglers can keep any sized hatchery produced Chinook or Coho which is easily identifiable by a clipped adipose fin, while releasing wild salmon from stocks of concern. This strategy allows the fishery to continue successfully, while simplifying potentially complex regional management rules.
- **Releasing wild (unmarked) Chinook is part of the MSF plan. It requires wild Chinook to be released which allows them to migrate through the fishing area** and back to their home rivers, while permitting the Public fishery to operate at a sustainable level by retaining adipose clipped salmon. The release of wild Chinook in ocean fisheries facilitates Fraser River First Nations access to food, social and ceremonial fishery requirements;
- **Currently DFO clips just 10% of hatchery Chinook production annually** through the Salmon Enhancement Program. This low rate of marking must be increased dramatically and quickly. There are approximately 25,000,000 Chinook raised in Southern BC hatcheries each year, of which the bulk are produced for harvest opportunities.
- **Washington State, according to law, mass marks Chinook and Coho at a 100% rate.** Adipose clipped US hatchery production contributes between 50% and 80% of the abundance of Chinook in key southern BC angling waters during the spring and early summer key fishing period, but must be released under the current Chinook non-retention regulation. Washington State has plans to increase Chinook hatchery production an additional 12 million by 2020. Additional mass marking of all existing southern BC hatchery Chinook will further increase the proportion of available adipose-clipped fish for MSF retention opportunities; and,
- **Transitioning towards a MSF as soon as possible is a priority component of a well thought out comprehensive Chinook action plan.** This type of initiative will accelerate wild Chinook recovery, restore reasonable fishing expectations and opportunities for the public and rebuild confidence in the stability of the world class Public fishery service infrastructure in Southern British Columbia.

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(ii) Utilize Strategic Enhancement Combined with the Protection and Restoration of Critical Habitat to Reverse Chinook Abundance Trends:

- **The strategic enhancement and habitat restoration of Upper and Middle Fraser River Chinook stocks of concern must take precedence immediately. A multi-faceted “all tools in the box” approach will be required.** These tools include but are not limited to accelerated habitat restoration, modern Chinook hatchery production technologies, the use of proven over-wintering protocols, pen rearing for improved survival rates, water conservation and protection, research and stock assessment, angler cooperation and relationship building with 1st nations for the benefit of salmon and those who depend on them, public/private financial investments, strategic increases in Chinook production, and proper land use and habitat protections that put salmon first. These goals have not been acted on in any effective way to date by the DFO and the Provincial government. Aside from enacting increasingly restrictive fishing regulations over the last decade with failed outcomes, DFO has ignored progressive solutions to rebuild these important Fraser River Chinook stocks. The recently announced 5 year joint Federal/Provincial \$142 million salmon recovery fund is a welcome step in the right direction, but its success will depend on how the money is spent.
- **In the face of climate change** DFO and the Provincial government must shift Chinook recovery thinking away from methods that were unsuccessful. They must move towards strategies that embrace new thinking, require decisive and proactive actions on those stocks that are most likely to be affected by adverse climate impacts, moderate and preferably reduce predator/prey interactions and effectively mitigate adverse impacts from increased human activities and population growth. Partnering with the private sector, including the sharing of proven technologies, are keys to halting and reversing declines, and will assist in accelerating the achievement of successful outcomes.

BC Chamber of Commerce Survey Data

379 Businesses on Vancouver Island Surveyed

ONE MONTH AFTER NON-RETENTION REGULATION IMPLEMENTED

71% of businesses have experienced cancelled bookings

22% report business being down over 50% compared to this time last year

(iii) Protect the \$1.1 billion public fishery infrastructure, sustain employment and maintain the many benefits that accrue to Canada

Chinook salmon are the backbone of the public fishery. Chinook are revered around the world as spectacular game fish attracting many thousands of tourist anglers to BC every year. The resident angler has a long standing cultural attachment to these salmon, and considers bringing one home for the dinner table as one of the most important benefits of the overall angling experience;

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- **There is great diversity within the BC Public fishing industry much of it homegrown and cutting edge.** It includes manufacturers, distributors, retailers, boat and engine sales and maintenance, charter boat and fishing lodge operations. The bulk of it is 100% BC owned and operated. Much of this infrastructure is located in remote communities where other job opportunities are scarce. This \$1 billion business has historically grown out of the desire to catch, and more importantly, retain a Chinook salmon;
- **The disintegration of the Public Fishery and its infrastructure must be avoided.** In 2019 DFO badly miscalculated the consequences of a Chinook non-retention policy that virtually eliminated Chinook fishing expectation and opportunity. This sent out a message that BC is closed to fishing. The impact will affect most of the Province's south coast waters for at least two thirds of the peak fishing period. Few businesses can realistically survive this type of unnecessary regulatory attack for more than one season. It could have been avoided because there are already sufficient adipose clipped Chinook in south coast waters to support a limited Selective Mark Fishery.

BC Chamber of Commerce Survey Data

379 Businesses on Vancouver Island Surveyed

ONE MONTH AFTER NON-RETENTION REGULATION IMPLEMENTED

96% of businesses say they will lose customers and clients

37% will have to lay off staff

46% feel the future of their business is now in question

27% say they will have to close their business this season or next

In Summary:

"People need salmon and salmon need people" (Tom Rutherford-retired DFO Community Advisor). The creators of this briefing note strongly recommend our government takes immediate and decisive action to implement a Southern BC Chinook salmon recovery program, to include habitat protection and restoration, innovative freshwater water management and allocation, research and strategic stock enhancement. The program must include implementation of Marked Selective Chinook fishing made possible through mass marking all hatchery reared Chinook and strategically enhancing Chinook to benefit the public fishery and endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales. With the Federal Election approaching, your support for British Columbia's Public Fishery and assistance in these objectives being implemented are critical.