

Newsletter

Aboriginal Aquaculture Association

Special Issue



AAA Makes Recommendations to Cohen Commission

The Cohen Commission was established on November 5, 2009 to investigate and report on the decline of sockeye salmon in the Fraser River. Based on its findings through public and evidentiary hearings, submissions and technical reports the commission is scheduled to submit its much-anticipated final report on or before June 30, 2012.

The report will make recommendations for improving the future sustainability of the sockeye salmon fishery in the Fraser River, including, as required, any changes to the policies, practices and procedures of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in relation to the management of the Fraser River sockeye salmon fishery. The Aboriginal Aquaculture association anticipates that the Commission's report will include recommendations in relation to improvements in aquaculture

The Commission recognized the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association's substantial and direct interest in the subject matter of the inquiry, and selected AAA as one of only 50 groups selected to participate in the proceedings, sharing a total of 21 official grants of standing. During the summer of 2011, the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association participated in evidentiary hearings, cross-examining representatives from the Department of Fisheries & Oceans, industry, environmental and conservation organizations, and others making submissions or providing evidence to the Commission. While there was difference of opinion on the area of aquaculture in general, there was also substantial common ground. The Commission heard from a host of experts who, with only one exception (Raincoast Research Society), were unanimous in their opinion that open-pen aquaculture could co-exist with thriving wild stocks



With standing before the Commission, the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association was also invited to formulate and provide our own recommendations directly to the Commission. Making clear that the overriding priorities for AAA are (i) the flourishing of wild salmon stocks, (ii) the protection and promotion of aboriginal culture and values, and (iii) alleviation of poverty through sustainable economic and community development, in September of 2011, the AAA Board submitted the following 5 recommendations to the Cohen Commission that they thought should be passed to the federal and provincial governments:

1) **Apply the highest standards and best practices to the aquaculture industry;**

Industry should be held to the best and highest standards of practice. The best evidence and expert opinion available to date supports the view that the aquaculture and wild stocks can co-exist if best practices in the industry are followed.

2) **Fund independent scientific research on aquaculture;**

The federal and provincial governments and the aquaculture industry should adequately fund independent expert research to ensure that the industry achieves and maintains an optimal healthy relationship between pen fish and the surrounding environment. The issues concerning aquaculture and fish health are highly politicized making it difficult to distinguish objective science from scientific advocacy.

3) **Engage in meaningful consultations with First Nations and give priority to First Nations in licensing decisions;**

Federal and Provincial governments should:

- a) *fully engage in meaningful consultations with First Nations where aquaculture licenses have or may be granted or renewed in and around their traditional waters*
- b) *support and promote First Nations involvement in the business of aquaculture including by giving First Nations priority standing in acquiring leases and licenses in and around their traditional waters.*

4) **Ensure First Nations participation in the management of the aquaculture industry;** and

The federal and provincial governments and the aquaculture industry should remove barriers and promote increased First Nations participation in the management of the aquaculture industry through training, joint ventures, access to investment capital, the granting of licenses, and similar measures.

5) **Support First Nations certification programs.**

Certification should receive the support of government and industry as it is a viable way to increase First Nations participation in the management of the aquaculture industry. The Aboriginal Aquaculture Association has developed a set of Aboriginal Principles for Sustainable Aquaculture that include: transparency and inclusiveness, social responsibility, environmental responsibility and economic responsibility

Final report to be released June 2012

The Aboriginal Aquaculture Association appreciated the opportunity to present our views to the Cohen Commission with regard to the positive steps the Crown can take to fulfill its obligations to coastal First Nations people while at the same time promoting the common goals of healthy and sustainable stocks, fisheries, and communities. The Commission heard from dozens of witnesses and received thousands of documents during the course of its work. A considerable amount of the information is devoted to improving the vitality of the Fraser River Sockeye and other wild runs as well. There is no doubt that Commissioner Cohen will have much to say in his June report about improvements to aquaculture, and the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association looks forward to contributing to those improvements.

The overriding priorities for AAA are (1) the flourishing of wild salmon stocks, (ii) the protection and promotion of aboriginal culture and values, and (iii) alleviation of poverty through sustainable economic and community development.

Contact Us:

Aboriginal Aquaculture Association

#105-2005 Eagle Drive

Campbell River, BC

V9H 1V8,

Phone: (250) 286-9939

Fax: (250) 286-9939

www.aboriginalaquaculture.com

