



Pacific Region

September 26, 2019

Via E-mail

Dear First Nations and Stakeholders;

On behalf of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), I would like to acknowledge your efforts to provide advice to the Department on the Draft 2019/2020 Southern BC Salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMP). Planning for the 2019 season was challenging given expectations for poor returns for many populations and consultations on additional management measures for stocks of concern. This resulted in the Department receiving extensive correspondence providing advice and recommendations that informed the development of management approaches outlined in the Salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plans. This letter provides additional information on how the Department addressed some of the key issues discussed during consultations into the final Southern BC Salmon IFMP.

As you are likely aware, DFO received a range of input, advice and recommendations from First Nations and stakeholders outlining suggested changes to management measures and approaches that are documented in the IFMP. As part of the annual IFMP consultation process, the Department compiled and summarized this input for review and discussion at local and regional advisory processes. Feedback from this input and the consultation process was taken into consideration when finalizing the IFMP. Below is a summary of the key changes that were made to this year's Southern IFMP.

- **Fraser River Sockeye:** key considerations during consultations included the duration of the window closure to protect weak Sockeye stocks at the start of the season; and, the escapement plan for Early Summer, Summer and Late run Sockeye including Low Abundance Exploitation Rate (LAERs) limits and Total Allowable Mortality (TAM) caps for the four Sockeye management units. For 2019, the Department implemented a 4 week window closure to start the season. The approved Escapement Plan also identified a 10% LAER for Early Stuart Sockeye, 20% LAERs for Early Summer and Summer, and 20% for Late run Sockeye with TAM caps of 60% for each of these units. This plan is intended to provide harvest flexibility for FSC and other fisheries if there is limited Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and 60% TAM caps are retained to provide added protection to weak stocks within the aggregates if returns are above the upper fishery reference points. If in-season assessment information indicates that the escapement targets in the Fraser Sockeye escapement plan are not going to be achieved then the priority is conservation. In cases when the total allowable mortality minus any management adjustment results in a zero or very low total allowable mortality for a timing group the intent of the LAER is to allow as many fish to pass to the spawning grounds as possible while allowing some incidental harvest, and in some cases some directed harvest when there is little opportunity for harvest directed on other Fraser Sockeye stock groups or species. Terminal harvest opportunities will be explored where there are strong escapements expected. Details of the management plan are in section 13.5 in the IFMP.
- **Southern BC Chinook:** new fishery management measures were implemented for 2019 fisheries to address conservation concerns for Fraser River Chinook Salmon populations. Assessments from the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in November 2018 found majority of Fraser River origin stocks to be *endangered*, *threatened*, or *special concern*. The full status information is available at the following link:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/committee-status-endangered->

[wildlife/assessments/wildlife-species-assessment-summary-nov-2018.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/fisheries-oceans/news/2019/04/government-of-canada-takes-action-to-address-fraser-river-chinook-decline.html). On April 16, the Government of Canada announced new fisheries management measures to conserve Fraser River Chinook (see news release: <https://www.canada.ca/en/fisheries-oceans/news/2019/04/government-of-canada-takes-action-to-address-fraser-river-chinook-decline.html>). Highly precautionary fishery restrictions are intended to provide a high degree of protection to at risk Fraser Spring 4₂, Spring 5₂ and Summer 5₂ Chinook returning in 2019. The management target is to reduce overall Canadian fishery mortalities on these populations to near 5% (note: actual outcomes may vary around this target given uncertainties in the data and will be evaluated post-season). Achieving these conservation objectives is the highest priority and requires significant actions in commercial troll, recreational and First Nations fisheries in times and areas where at risk Fraser Chinook may be encountered. Management measures to address conservation concerns for Fraser Chinook will likely be required for several years; further discussion with First Nations and advisory groups will occur on management measures that will be required in 2020. Details of the management actions can be found in section 13.1 of the IFMP. The Department has also initiated an engagement process to seek advice on a broad range of issues that are impacting Fraser Chinook stocks, including: fisheries management measures; habitat protection and conservation issues, including land and water use management; habitat restoration opportunities; the role of hatcheries to support rebuilding and the potential for marked fisheries; how seals and sea lions may be affecting Fraser Chinook salmon, and other relevant topics. Further information will be shared as the process gets underway.

- **Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW):** there are a number of new measures focused on broadening and strengthening protection for the SRKW. These include additional fishery management actions to support increased Chinook Salmon prey availability for SRKW in important foraging areas within the critical habitat. Area-based closures in key foraging areas for recreational and commercial salmon fisheries, (rules for other fisheries in these areas will remain unchanged) which will take effect after the Chinook conservation non-retention measures end (July 31, 2019) and will remain in place through the end of October, including:
 - Strait of Juan de Fuca (Areas 20-3, 20-4): Recreational and commercial salmon closures in effect in key foraging areas from July 15 or August 1, depending on the sub-area, until October 31.
 - Gulf Islands (portions of Areas 18-9, 18-4, 18-5, 18-2): Recreational and commercial closures in effect in key foraging areas from August 1 until October 31.

In addition, there are new interim sanctuary zones and general vessel measures outlined in the IFMP to address acoustic and physical disturbance. Details of the measures can be found in section 5.3.13.2 in the IFMP.

- **Interior Fraser River Steelhead:** conservation measures under the new Steelhead Action Plan (<https://www.canada.ca/en/fisheries-oceans/news/2019/07/background-governments-of-canada-and-province-of-british-columbia-partner-to-take-bold-action-to-protect-steelhead-trout.html>) outline comprehensive measures to support recovery of steelhead. In the Fraser River and marine areas including Nitinat, a 42 day rolling window closure will be in place for commercial gillnet and seine fisheries, and 27 day rolling window closure for commercial troll. These measures apply to fisheries on the Steelhead migratory route on both the west coast and the east coast of Vancouver Island, and in the Fraser River and tributaries downstream of Thompson and Chilcotin Steelhead spawning and holding areas. For recreational fisheries, a 42 day rolling window closure will be in place in the Fraser River and tributaries downstream of Thompson and Chilcotin Steelhead spawning and holding areas. For First Nations FSC, there is a 27 day rolling window closure for gillnet and selective gear in the Fraser River and tributaries downstream of Thompson and Chilcotin Steelhead spawning and holding areas. Details of these measures are contained within Section 13.2 Southern Chum Salmon Fishing Plan.
- **Interior Fraser River (IFR) Coho:** based on persistent, on-going low productivity for Interior

Fraser River Coho, the Department has maintained a precautionary approach to management of southern BC fisheries with management measures in place similar to those in place prior to 2014. As a result, fisheries impacts will be limited to incidental, by-catch or release mortalities in most areas and in recent years this was expected to result in a 3-5% Canadian domestic exploitation rate.

- **Commercial Salmon Allocation Framework (CSAF):** Please see Appendix 6 of the plan for a description of CSAF demonstration fisheries which were reviewed successfully through the Departments Evaluation Framework. CSAF demonstration proposals will be discussed with local stakeholders and First Nations to inform fisheries planning prior to implementation. Please note that implementation of CSAF demonstrations are subject to final fishing plans being approved in the area and sufficient returns to allow for opportunities.

DFO utilizes a range of information to manage fisheries in-season and decision making often incorporates science advice on the impact of environmental factors on in-season indicators of salmon returns, migration and fish condition. Environmental conditions and associated uncertainties may require additional adjustments to the fisheries management approaches outlined in this IFMP. For example, these adjustments could include changes to planned openings, harvest levels and timing of fisheries; management adjustments to account for adverse environmental conditions; time or area closures in specific locations to protect spawners that may be aggregating due to poor migratory conditions; additional selective fishing requirements; or other measures necessary to achieve sufficient spawner requirements. Further information on specific management actions is communicated in-season by Fisheries Notice.

An assessment of management approaches and outcomes of the 2019 season will be reviewed during post-season meetings in the fall. Further consultation on approaches for 2020 and beyond is planned as part of the process to develop the 2020/21 IFMPs.

Copies of the full IFMP's may be obtained online at the links below:

Northern: <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/40797168.pdf>

Southern: <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/40799104.pdf>

Many of the letters submitted on the IFMP identified areas where additional information, analysis or review is requested to inform suggested future changes to the IFMP and further discussion will be required. The Department will be tracking the issues raised during consultations on this year's IFMP to help inform future discussions with First Nations and stakeholders. Given the broad range of issues raised through the IFMP development process, we expect further discussion will be required to identify key priorities for the coming year. As such, the Department will be seeking further feedback on potential priorities to support development of next year's IFMP.

Thank you again for providing comments on the Draft 2019/2020 Southern BC Salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMP). DFO recognizes the importance of the salmon resource to First Nations and stakeholders, and values the opportunities to share information and ideas through our consultation processes.

Please contact your local area Resource Manager if you would like to discuss any of these areas further.

Yours sincerely,

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