

Wilderness Tourism Association



BRITISH COLUMBIA | CANADA

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Dear members of the WTA

Re: Cohen Commission Hearings

On Sept 6, 7 and 8 I attended the Cohen Commission hearings pertaining to Aquaculture's impact on the Fraser River Sockeye. The hearings were set up in a Vancouver court room where half the space is devoted to the commission staff and those with commission 'status', their legal council and witnesses, and half to the public. Attendance was a full house of about 120 members of the public on the 7 and 8th of Sept and about 60 on the 6th.

Witnesses, who had been previously selected from those with standing, were called by the different councils. Their evidence was formally presented by legal council and questions were asked of them. Councils more or less form two groups: those in favour of current salmon farming practices (i.e. open net pen salmon farms) and believe that these practices have no impact on wild salmon (the salmon farming industry), and those that strongly believe that current management practices do impact wild salmon (the conservation sector). The exception being the Cohen Commission council, which is supposed to be a neutral and objective party.

Councils acting on behalf of the salmon farm industry included the Federal government, the Provincial government, the Farm's council, and the Aboriginal Aquaculture Council. For the conservation sector, councils represented the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform (CAAR) group and Alexandra Morten. Also, a number of First Nations and Area D Gillnetters were represented by their councils and were generally supporting the conservation sector's arguments.

The main positive outcome of the Cohen Commission process was that the 'secret' documents about disease records were made public. These records, along with what I have personally seen, continue to lead me to believe that farmed salmon in open net pens located on wild salmon migratory corridors are highly impacting wild salmon. They do this because they serve as incubation or amplifying chambers for viruses and parasites initiating from both wild and farm fish.

It is my understanding that Judge Cohen will make his recommendations next summer to the Prime Minister. I would hope Cohen's recommendations with regard to Aquaculture will include:

- A requirement that all records kept by government and the salmon farms with regard to ascertaining fish health both in the farm stock and in the wild stock that pass by or thru the farms be transparent and publicly available in a timely manner;

- That the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) should be split up, and there be a fisheries group that is responsible for protecting wild stocks using the best available science, and another group that would be responsible for regulating and controlling the salmon farms and ensure that they meet the standards recommended by the first group. Still another government agency should be responsible to promoting and marketing the Canadian salmon farming industry if Canadians and the government that represents them feel that this is a prudent use of tax dollars*;
- That the virus work undertaken by DFO's Dr. Kristie Miller and others be properly funded so they can reach an independent and well informed conclusion about the impact of viruses amplified by salmon farms located in migratory corridors of the wild sockeye salmon.

Finally I would like to see a recommendation that would remove open net pen salmon farms from wild salmon migration corridors. But I will not hold my breath for this recommendation to come to fruition.

*As stated by one reporter and echoed by many at the hearings "The DFO should be a neutral, science-based regulator, ensuring that the best evidence is used to set standards for fisheries, farmed and wild, that protect the environment and the public interest. That role is undermined, even corrupted, if the government department becomes an advocate for a particular industry segment. Its impartiality and willingness to enforce standards is cast in doubt. Its pronouncements can no longer be trusted."

Regards Brian

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