

A Fraser Panel Update

After returning from the latest Fraser Panel meetings, I thought it was time now to give a brief update as to what I felt the main issues were/are. Given the fact that we met for four days implies that there was no shortage of issues to discuss for the 2004 season. The issues were varied, both in terms of complexity and urgency; it never ceases to amaze me the issues that can, and apparently do, arise from these bilateral discussions with the Americans on Fraser Bound stocks.

I will begin by listing some of the 2003 research projects on Late Run Fraser River Sockeye issues, which have had mixed results (reports can be obtained): results from the 2003 Late Run radio telemetry study (nothing new here, the earlier the fish enter into the river, the greater the percentage mortality); 2004 proposed fisheries management division sampling program recommendations; NSERC report on the 2003 abnormal migration timing and mortality of Late Fraser River sockeye salmon (in my opinion this study has yielded the most interesting findings and promises to continue, providing funding levels are maintained); Linking oceanic conditions to migration timing of late run sockeye; implications of changing the Mission hydro acoustic system from a single beam to a split beam; and finally a report prepared by the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) on policy/technical issues re: 2004 Fraser River sockeye salmon management.

The reports listed above, and subsequent issues they raise are lengthy and other than raising

awareness about the existence of these reports, full detail is beyond the scope of this article; I would encourage all Fraser Tribes to ask questions and seek advice from technical staff where possible. Of particular interest to me, as a Fraser Panel representative is the memo submitted by the PSC staff seeking policy advice on 2004 sockeye. This memo raises a number of issues that will have direct implications to how Fraser Tribes conduct their fisheries this coming year including: the degree of accuracy in predicting late run entry and subsequent mortality, changing from a single beam to a split beam stock assessment regime at Mission; developing management plans that balance the competing demands of conservation and harvest of Fraser sockeye; the run size of Lates this year may be too small to accurately predict i.e. 3% of summer run size, which will create uncertainty, even using DNA, in predicting run timing and run strength; and finally of course how to deal with Cultus Lake and Sakinaw sockeye.

On another note, last year DFO put on a workshop held at the Pacific Palisades Hotel, April 2003, to hear proposals put forward by various groups to improve the information gathering methods directed at run size estimation of Fraser River sockeye. Five projects were accepted. In January a follow-up workshop was held to look at the results of these new projects. Another workshop is being held during the week of April 12 to 16 to look at more proposals. I think now would be a good time for Fraser River Tribes to explore new and innovative ways of doing stock

assessment, and test fishing in the Fraser River.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, are issues regarding conduct for the pacific salmon commission staff for the 2004 season. Key issues are:

- 1) **In season run-size projections and fisheries management recommendations**
 - a) The mid-season forecast provided by Canada will be used for management purposes until mid-season updates of run-size become available. The PSC staff will provide the Panel recommendations for in-season run-size, based on information such as in-season estimates of run timing, and diversion rates.
 - b) PSC staff will provide the panel with projected harvestable surpluses and status of harvest from fisheries under panel management. These projections will incorporate Fraser Panel agreement on management adjustments that deal with environmental conditions that could impact the ability of the panel to achieve spawning escapement objectives.
 - c) Any changes from PSC staff recommendations for points 1) a) and 1) b) above shall be based on bilateral agreement between the National Sections of the Fraser Panel. Acceptance of the PSC staff recommendation requires approval of at least one of the National Sections

- d) The respective National Sections of the Panel will develop proposed regulations for their domestic Panel Water fisheries consistent with recommendations and projections provided by the PSC staff. Either National Section may ask PSC staff for advice in designing its fisheries proposals. PSC staff will assess and provide advice as to whether proposed fishery regulations for Panel Water fisheries are consistent with recommendations and projections. Subsequently, after full discussion of a Panel water fishery proposal, the following may occur: (i) the Panel may adopt the proposal based on bilateral agreement or; (ii) the proposing National Section may modify and re-submit its proposal in response to advice from staff and/or concern(s) raised by the other National Section; or (iii) while acknowledging objection(s) of the other National Section, the Panel will grant the request to adopt the fishery proposal. In the event that the Panel adopts a fishery under the provisions of the latter circumstance (1(d)(iii)), prior to the commencement of the proposed fishery, the proposing National Section must provide a written rationale for the fishery as submitted **(this is very important to understand)**
- e) If post-season a party maintains that it has been adversely affected by a

fishery; the PSC staff will prepare an objective report on the circumstances of the fishery and its consequences for the January PSC meeting following the season in question. The Panel will review the staff report and determine what action is required. If the Panel cannot come to agreement on the appropriate action, the issue will be referred to the Commission for resolution during their February annual meeting.

I want to stress these guidance structures to Fraser First Nations simply because it is within this type of structure of run size projections and fisheries management recommendations, that the 2004 fishery will be conducted.

A final issue is the calculation of Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Again I strongly encourage Fraser First Nations to pay attention to these following commission guidance suggestions for TAC calculations for the upcoming 2004 season.

- a) For 2004, for the purpose of computing the TAC for sharing purposes, the Panel shall define the TAC as the aggregate Fraser River sockeye run (including any catch of Fraser River sockeye identified in Alaskan waters) after the spawning escapement targets established by application of Canada's pre-season escapement plan (subject to any adjustments specified in paragraph 3(b) of Annex IV), the agreed Fraser River Aboriginal

Exemption, and the catch in Panel authorized test fisheries have been deducted.

- b) For the purpose of paragraph 8 of Chapter 4, Annex IV, except as provided in (c) below,} only the future US shares will be adjusted for any harvest overage of the US shares in 2003 and in a manner consistent with paragraph 8 of Chapter 4, Annex IV.
- c) In 2004, if the catch in Canada directly impedes the U.S. pursuing its in-season TAC, this circumstance will be noted in-season by the Panel including the effect Canada's catch had on impeding the U.S. pursuit of its in-season share, and will be compensated for pursuant to paragraph 8 of Annex IV

While much of this work is still in the discussion stage it is these types of issues that help provide direction to Fraser Panel members as the season progresses. I encourage you or your fisheries representatives to ask questions and I will do my best to keep you informed.

For more information, please Contact Marcel Shepert at mshepert@cstc.bc.ca

Upcoming Meetings

April 7/04. Tier 1 Meeting
Details to follow Friday, March 26, 2004