

A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for
fisheries representatives and their organizations

A letter to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans from Grand Chief Clarence Pennier

October 2, 2009

Dear Minister Shea:

Re: 2009 Fraser River Sockeye

The disparity between the forecasted and actual returns of Fraser River sockeye this summer is deeply troubling. The collapse of the sockeye runs is profoundly affecting the First Nations of the Fraser River. Our ancient dry rack camps in the Fraser Canyon fell silent this summer, canning jars were put away empty and freezers are devoid of sockeye. Our elders and young families are not sure how they will feed themselves this winter. Sockeye are their main source of dietary protein. Protein rich foods are expensive. Our people live on fixed incomes from sources like Canada Pension, Veterans Pensions and social assistance. They don't have the money to shop for protein rich foods at places like Safeway. And to suggest that Indians on the Fraser River can substitute pink salmon for sockeye is a callous remark. The majority of Indian nations on the Fraser does not have access to either pink or chum. Most pink spawn below Hell's Gate and virtually all chum spawn below Hope, B.C. It's my impression that your regional staff did not brief you well on the impact of failed sockeye runs on the Indian nations.

It is October 2, 2009 and it is still not clear to me what your plan is in face of this summer's sockeye crisis. Something far more than simply a post-season review is necessary. The B.C. Environment Minister, Barry Penner, has called for a public review into the failure of the sockeye runs. And environmental groups and commercial fishermen are demanding a judicial inquiry.

I suppose they want to see DFO employees publically excoriated and sent to jail. Sadly, some folks in the industrial fishery are also back to the old game of "let's blame the Indians for the collapse of sockeye". Regrettably, these people are as wretched as card carrying members of the Flat Earth Society.

I am not interested in the blame game. I want to do something constructive about sockeye. I want to work with your department to ensure that the outlook for sockeye is improved in the near future. I don't want to see another summer like the summer of 2009. I think we need to roll up our sleeves and work together to ensure there are always enough sockeye for everyone. To accomplish this task, may I suggest a committee made up of all the sectors to begin planning a review of the 2009 season and come up with a long-term plan to both conserve and restore the Fraser's sockeye. I know there are currently many groups giving advice to the DFO on salmon, but, unfortunately, their reputations are too closely tied to the current failure of the Sockeye runs. In other words, if the advice they were giving to the DFO was truly sagacious, why are the sockeye runs faltering so badly?

I would be willing to work with a small regional planning committee to scope out the work of a review of the 2009 season and to initiate the long range planning necessary to both conserve and restore salmon runs.

I await your reply.

Sincerely,
Grand Chief Clarence Pennier,
President, Sto:lo Tribal Council

"Something far more than simply a post-season review is necessary."

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MEETING NOTICES

October 15 & 16, 2009
FRASER SALMON ENGAGEMENT
PROCESS WORKSHOP
Executive Airport Plaza Hotel
Richmond BC

October 26, 2009
FRASER PANEL RENEGOTIATION
CONSULTATION
Best Western Rainbow Country Inn
Chilliwack BC

October 27, 2009
FRASER WATERSHED JOINT
TECHNICAL FORUM
Best Western Rainbow Country Inn
Chilliwack BC

October 28-30, 2009
FIRST NATIONS FISHERIES COUNCIL
FALL 2009 ASSEMBLY
Chehalis Indian Band, Harrison BC
For more information or to register visit
the council website at:
www.fnfisheriescouncil.ca

The Watershed Talk is available
for download at www.frafs.ca

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