

IEC UPDATE

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The last IEC meeting, August 27, 2004 was productive and generally speaking the mood was better than even I anticipated, there were no suspicious looking bomb squad dudes, or envelopes with anthrax on them, instead the mood was of cautious optimism, mixed with just enough anxiety to motivate those in attendance. Change was certainly the first thing on everyone's mind.

Participants from both DFO and First Nations made it very clear that FRAFS needs to change its focus; FRAFS needs to "up the anti" if it wants to survive, it must deliver on a set of objectives, with associated tasks, deliver something concrete, in short, show people that it works. The flip side of course is that FRAFS has outlived its shelf life, expired, and must now be replaced. The members of the IEC believe that these tough questions need to be asked of those who will be affected by it...YOU.

How can the relationship between and amongst Fraser First Nations, and the between DFO and First Nations, which seems to be going backward at the moment, find a new common ground? Back in January, a two day meeting was held in Kamloops which drew over forty participants from throughout the watershed, as the chair of the meeting, I was encouraged by the level of participation and by the level of discourse. At that meeting an overwhelming two thumbs up was given to the FRAFS and the IEC, clearly those in attendance wanted to send a message that they still wanted a watershed process - so what went so wrong since then?

The delays in AFS negotiations, the Kaap appeal, AAROM, budget cuts, IFMP, and SARA, all played a role in turning up the heat between DFO and First Nations; there were so many things going on simultaneously which allowed the parties to drift apart, rather rapidly too. Foot dragging and entrenchment will certainly slow progress no matter the region, or no matter the model.

It is also clear, and this has been addressed by both Brenda Gaertner, and Bob Brown, that **incentives** need to be addressed in order for First Nations to consider participation in a Tier One and Tier Two processes. In order to create incentives DFO needs to send a clear message that economic opportunity fisheries, regional management, with a heavy dose of ministerial delegation will be addressed, from the very top of the headwaters of the Fraser River, right down to the marine areas and beyond; this will surely create the political will necessary to break out of the "government and jobs model" which clearly isn't working within the AFS. I wonder how much longer this can go on?

Juxtapose the Washington state model with our current situation and realize that something has to change – soon.

It is important to remember and acknowledge the emergence of regional processes like; the UFFCA, and Lower Fraser Management Board, and consider how these will transform fisheries management, certainly these emerging models hold promise for the future, but what should be done in the interim? How can the current process help bridge these seemingly divergent processes? Two recently released reports Pierce McRae, and First Nations Panel report, supported the need, indeed recommended support for some kind of watershed process for First Nations to develop inter-tribal relationships, in order to develop fishing plans, which would create more certainty and stability in the BC Fishery. I wonder if we have a moral obligation to just allow 13 years of work to just stop.

There is no one solution; however, IEC members agreed that there were at least four immediate options to consider, please consider these as suggestions only, (any input would be greatly appreciated): status quo (current), diffuse Level 1 (E.D. and secretary left at the watershed level with the technicians moved out to the regions), diffuse level 2 (move only to a regional model), bi-lateral only (DFO engages only at the bi-lateral level with all First Nations).

It is with these final options I leave you with to ponder. The staff of FRAFS is all a very dedicated group, but also feeling like they need an infusion of renewed vigor and interest in what they do, some real support, or they too will seek the job satisfaction elsewhere. I don't blame anyone who wants move on in order to effect change in the BC Fishery, particularly after another bad year for the fish. FRAFS has/had such potential to do just that, but somehow the momentum and will to change the system got lost. Now isolationism is beginning to set in, and there appears to be no will to address long-standing issues of inter-tribal relationship, and unless something is done to shift the current drift, its everyone back to their respective corners and option four will prevail without so much as a peep.

WEB LINKS

Go to the Pacific Salmon Commission's website at www.psc.org for the most up to date technical information. Download the Excel file titled PSC_ESC.xls for a complete breakdown of the sockeye escapements.

Current Opening/Closing Times and the Harvest Information for Lower and Upper Fraser are posted on the FRAFS website at www.frafs.ca.