

## Fraser Sockeye Judicial Inquiry Letter from the FRAFS EC

Seeking information on how First Nations can participate in the upcoming Judicial Inquiry on the collapse of Fraser River Sockeye, the FRAFS Executive Committee (First Nations Caucus) sent the following letter to British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Bruce Cohen. In November 2009, Justice Cohen was named the head of the Judicial Inquiry process. The FRAFS Executive Committee sees this Inquiry as a valuable opportunity to voice First Nations' concerns about salmon management, and tell the Commission what changes need to be made to meet First Nations' needs. Any information gathered about the inquiry will be shared in future issues of the Watershed Talk newsletter.

January 4, 2010

Dear Justice Bruce Cohen:

We are writing to apprise you of our interest in your forthcoming Judicial Inquiry into the collapse of the Fraser River sockeye salmon run in 2009. On behalf of Fraser River First Nations, we welcome this Inquiry and look forward to contributing to it.

The Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat is a watershed wide bi-lateral organization that provides technical and communications services to Fraser River First Nations. Our office is located in the Nicola Tribal Association offices in Merritt BC. We attempt to assist both parties (First Nations and DFO) with bridging the gap between them through better communications, and through the provision of policy and technical assistance to First Nations to help them understand and deal with the fishery management decisions that affect their fish stocks, their rights in those stocks, and their very lives. Our website ([www.frafs.ca](http://www.frafs.ca)) provides a more complete description of the Secretariat and how we function in the Fraser Watershed.

As we are sure you are well aware, the 102 First Nation communities belonging to seven different First Nations throughout the Fraser River watershed have a profound interest in the health and well being of all the Fraser River sockeye salmon populations. Our title and rights in this resource have existed for millennia before the coming of the non-indigenous settlers; and our title and rights have been confirmed even by the governments and judicial systems put in place by non-indigenous peoples in Canada.

Our identity, our heritage, our culture, and our traditions are inextricably inter-twined with the salmon. If the salmon disappear, so do we as distinct First Nation peoples. The health of Fraser River salmon – and by extension, the health of First Nations people – has been compromised and jeopardized by federal and provincial government management regimes. We are optimistic that your Judicial Inquiry will identify the inherent flaws in a fisheries management regime that has continued to sacrifice its constitutional obligations to First Nations and

to the fisheries resource itself for the sake of expediency and “the greater good”.

The Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat is hoping to meet with you and key members of your staff to discuss such questions as the following:

1. How does a Judicial Inquiry work?
2. What can Fraser River First Nations expect from it?
3. How can (or should) a First Nation contribute to your Inquiry?
4. What is involved in contributing to or participating in it?
5. First Nations have very limited financial resources compared to those of the rest of society. Given the unique nature of the relationship between Fraser First Nations and our sockeye salmon resources, it is critically important that First Nation leaders participate in and contribute meaningfully to your Inquiry. To do so, we will need funds for assigning our technical/scientific advisors to this task; and we will need funds to enable us to utilize the legal assistance and guidance necessary for our participation. According to the Inquiry Terms of Reference, financial assistance may be available through your Commission – this would be an important part of a discussion with you and your staff.
6. What is your preliminary schedule of hearings? Are you prepared to move the seat of your inquiry to locations outside of the Lower Mainland, for example to interior centres of the Fraser Watershed such as Kamloops, Lillooet, Williams Lake, and Prince George?

We look forward to receiving a positive response to our request for a meeting with you and your staff to discuss the above questions. Such a meeting will be invaluable in helping the Secretariat assist First Nations with understanding the role of your Judicial Inquiry and its potential ramifications for the future of our salmon resources. Please direct your response to our Operations Manager whose contact information is given below.

Sincerely,

Ernie Crey, FRAFS Executive Committee member

*On behalf of the First Nations Caucus of the FRAFS Executive Committee*

## New Inter-tribal Treaty Organization Office in New Westminster

Grand Chief Saul Terry, leader of the First Nations Inter-tribal Treaty process in the Fraser watershed, is pleased to announce that the Inter-tribal Treaty Organization has opened a new office in New Westminster. The address is Suite 250, 550 Sixth Street, at the corner of Sixth Street and 6th Avenue. A more detailed update about the new office and the current state of the Inter-tribal Treaty Organization will be provided in a future issue of the Watershed Talk.

## Meeting Notices

### Fraser Watershed Joint Technical Forum

Wednesday, January 20  
Super 8 Hotel  
1881 Sumas Way  
Abbotsford, BC

### Forum on Conservation and Harvest Planning for Fraser Salmon

Thursday, January 21 &  
Friday, January 22  
Super 8 Hotel  
1881 Sumas Way  
Abbotsford, BC

### Fraser Salmon Management “Roadmap” Workshop

Wednesday, February 3 &  
Thursday, February 4  
Comfort Inn  
1810 Rogers Place  
Kamloops BC

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