

The Fraser and Southern Panel Processes: A First Nation inside perspective

By Marcel Shepert, FRAFS Chair

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The purpose of this article is to inform all of those with a possible interest in participating as a member on one of the panels, i.e. Fraser panel, or Southern panel of the PSC process, of the commitment needed to effectively engage.

The Fraser and Southern panels are both processes within the larger process, Pacific Salmon Treaty which was last renewed in 1999. Many chapters or annexes are set to expire in 2008, specifically the Coho, Chinook, Chum, Transboundary, and Northern annexes. Of course all of these annexes, but one, are important to Fraser First Nations; however, the degree of importance to which these issues differ will vary depending upon region, access, and to some extent political position. From my perspective, one of the key issues is the lack of Aboriginal participation, which is approximately twenty five percent across the board. Past negotiations have not included significant First Nations input and unless things change drastically and in a hurry, there will not be a lot of change for this round of negotiation either.

Recently a letter was distributed by the regional director general seeking nominations on behalf of Fraser River First Nations for the vacancy on the Southern Panel and "potential future vacancies" on the Fraser Panel. The letter is encouraging in that it seems to imply that more representation for First Nations may be forthcoming. Having said that however, this is not a given and without a collective push and a mechanism to select and populate these positions, twenty five percent may remain the magic number.

In order to prepare potential new appointees I have been asked to share my experience to prepare new appointees for the task ahead. I have been a Fraser Panel member for the past four years, and in that four year time frame I have gained a lot of experience which has enriched my professional career and allowed me to learn a great deal about international relations and the language of diplomacy and negotiation. In my opinion a new member should consider who they represent and be clear exactly what mandate they have to effectively engage at the table; without it you become an observer, thus not very effective.

The Fraser Panel process is primarily concerned with Fraser sockeye and pink salmon management, but also reviews other panel fishery regimes before making recommendations on Fraser fisheries. Panel representatives must be available year round, but mostly during the salmon fisheries, or "in-season" which occur typically between July and October. During the salmon fishery a panel member may engage in as many as three

teleconferences per week, which can take up to a whole day in duration. There can be as many as two face-to-face meetings, usually in Vancouver, per month. The rest of the year is focused on approximately seven face-to-face, two to three day meetings, dealing with the post season review, preseason forecasting, and IFMP development. All of these meetings are covered eventually by the panel, but bear in mind it is up to the member to pay the cost up front, a credit card is essential. If a representative wants to be effective then they should also account for time spent reporting back to constituents, this could add as many as ten additional days to prepare and report back. In total a representative could spend as many as fifty days or more preparing, attending, and reporting back. Of course this is only per diem time and does not include travel and planning, and the panel members only receive a stipend/per diem of, two hundred dollars per day for face-to-face meetings and fifty dollars per day for teleconferences. In my opinion this is not enough, so a potential candidate must seek resources from other sources in order to offset the cost and this will vary based upon experience and current position within an organization. My point is that it this is a significant time commitment which requires more resources than what the government currently offers.

In addition to the time commitment potential panel members must be aware of other prerequisites to membership, these include valid drivers license and access to a reliable vehicle, criminal record check, valid passport with the ability to travel to the United States at least twice a year, good writing skills, negotiations skills, and public presentation ability.

In conclusion, First Nations have an opportunity to increase representation which is important because negotiations are already in full swing. New representatives will have to consider the time and financial commitments and be ready to seek a negotiating mandate to effectively engage. Currently there are a number of First Nations lead processes which need to converge and agree upon a process for selection of candidates and to provide potential new members with additional resources and mandates to participate.

**Fraser Watershed Joint Technical
Committee Meeting: Tuesday, Dec 11
Ramada Plaza, Abbotsford
Please RSVP to Aimee Arsenaault by December 3**