

Minister of
Fisheries and Oceans



Ministre des
Pêches et des Océans

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E6

October 7, 2020

Mr. Martin Paish
Chair
Sport Fishing Advisory Board
< martinpaish1@gmail.com >

Dear Mr. Paish:

Thank you for your correspondence of June 25, 2020, sharing the Sport Fishing Advisory Board's concerns regarding 2020 management measures for Fraser River Chinook stocks of concern.

As you know, of the 13 wild Fraser River Chinook salmon populations assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), only one has been classified as not at risk. These declines need to be addressed urgently, as well as the changes to marine and freshwater ecosystems that are directly affecting salmon and our coastal communities. Addressing the challenges faced by Fraser River Chinook requires significant measures for all fisheries in areas where these stocks may be encountered.

Accordingly, on June 19, 2020, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) released the 2020 fisheries management measures to protect Fraser River Chinook. These measures were developed following consultation with Indigenous communities, recreational and commercial fishing organizations, and environmental organizations. Several recreational fishery opportunities have been announced in local areas where Chinook can be retained with low risk of Fraser River Chinook encounters.

The jobs and communities that depend on Chinook fisheries were heavily considered; however, conservation continues to be DFO's first priority in the management of the salmon fishery. These decisions were not taken lightly, but were made to ensure these critical stocks last now and into the future.

Though fisheries management measures are an important tool, they are not sufficient enough on their own to restore these important stocks. DFO understands this and is working on projects to support habitat protection and restoration, climate adaptation, improved stock assessment and enhanced science collaboration. For more information on these and other management measures for at-risk Fraser River Chinook, I encourage you to visit DFO's frequently asked questions webpage, which will be updated as new information becomes available.

.../2

With respect to your request for an expansion of mark selective fisheries, or MSF (i.e., retention of hatchery origin Chinook with missing adipose fin), there are a number of issues that need to be considered. DFO is currently reviewing information to support decision-making on potential expansion of MSF, including: conservation, ensuring uncompromised stock assessment information, cost, and effects on ecosystems.

With regard to conservation, MSF fisheries will still encounter wild Chinook; however, release mortalities of stocks of concern need to be accounted for to ensure MSF fisheries do not adversely impact wild unmarked stocks of conservation concern. MSFs are typically considered in areas where there are high proportions of hatchery fish. Frequently, and in many areas around Vancouver Island, the proportion of marked fish encounters would likely remain too low to support MSF without incurring substantial release mortality on unmarked wild fish.

DFO must also consider how to ensure stock assessment information is not compromised. Currently, Canadian hatcheries only mark hatchery Chinook that carry coded-wire tags (CWTs) to support stock assessment of both hatchery and wild fish from the same geographic area. Additional MSFs and/or additional clipping of hatchery fish that do not carry CWTs will require Canada to significantly adapt the fishery monitoring and stock assessment programs that are necessary to maintain information on wild Chinook and to meet Canada's Pacific Salmon Treaty obligations. This will require additional resources to ensure DFO meets our Pacific Salmon Treaty commitments.

In addition, DFO must examine the cost. Even without increasing current hatchery Chinook production, additional marking/clipping of significant additional numbers of hatchery-origin Chinook would incur substantial costs. In some areas, it may be logistically challenging given the large volumes of hatchery-origin Chinook being released within short timeframes each year.

Finally, DFO must look at the potential effects on ecosystems. The consideration for increasing production of hatchery-origin Chinook to support fisheries must be carefully planned in order to manage ecosystem effects (e.g., carrying capacity of natural systems to support salmon rearing); control potential competitive interactions between hatchery and wild salmon; and ensure that the genetic diversity of wild origin salmon is maintained.

While MSF opportunities could offer potential benefits for fisheries, they must also be balanced with a full understanding of the issues and potential resource requirements needed to mitigate the concerns. DFO is planning additional consultation in the fall of 2020 to further inform our decision-making. In addition, the Department is conducting a pilot project to mark Conuma Hatchery Chinook in conjunction with a project exploring the application of new stock assessment tools (e.g., parentage-based genetic tagging) of all hatchery-origin Chinook broodstock for the next three years. The results of this work will help DFO to further develop the approach for potential implication of MSFs.

Thank you again for providing me with your thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'B' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Honourable Bernadette Jordan, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

c.c.: Mr. Terry Beech, M.P.
Burnaby North–Seymour
The Honourable Doug Donaldson, M.L.A.
British Columbia's Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and
Rural Development
The Honourable Lana Popham, M.L.A.
British Columbia's Minister of Agriculture