

Conservative MPs worried about Liberal Fisheries Minister's continued incompetence on BC's public fishery

Looking ahead to the 2021 season, British Columbia's public fishery is facing a crisis.

Conservatives have met with members of BC's public fishery, who have expressed grave concerns that if political considerations continue to outweigh sound science, the impact on the angling industry, and the family livelihoods it sustains, will be devastating.

Despite the angling industry's economic contributions to both British Columbia and Canada, and the clear science that supports openings for some Chinook salmon public fisheries in key regions, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has refused to listen. In 2019, and then again in 2020, restrictive Chinook regulations were introduced that covered most of the public fishing season.

These are decisions based on politics, not science. Many Chinook salmon stocks in BC rivers are strong or stable.

BC hatcheries produce approximately 40 million Chinook each year. When added to the 70 million fin-clipped hatchery Chinook released in Washington State, this could make millions of Chinook available to be safely harvested by the public without impacting our wild salmon. These additional hatchery Chinook can help support the public fishery, our families, and species like Southern Resident killer whales that rely on salmon for food.

As it stands, public fishers cannot keep any hatchery Chinook within the south coast fishing region during the key summer fishing period. Instead, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has implemented increasingly restrictive public angling regulations, presumably to halt the decline in the Upper Fraser River wild Chinook. These restrictive measures have failed to work, even as harvest rates are reduced to unprecedented levels.

To address this issue, the Minister's Sport Fishing Advisory Board worked with the DFO to develop a plan and presented a package to the Minister that was based on her department's own data. Only non-threatened stocks would be harvested, while threatened stocks in all cases would be avoided using highly effective selective fishing methods. Minister Jordan rejected the proposal, and instead chose to repeat and expand Chinook non-retention in 2020.

For communities across BC, this is unacceptable. British Columbia's public salmon fishery is the most economically valuable salmon fishery on Canada's west coast. There's no question that it is an integral part of BC's broader public fishery, valued at over \$1.1 billion annually, and one that our communities depend on.

We care about the health and sustainability of our iconic west coast salmon. But if action isn't immediately taken to correct these harmful policies, livelihoods will be lost.

As proud British Columbians, we understand the vital role our province's public fishery plays in supporting our economy and promoting important family traditions. Some of our favourite memories are of fishing with our families.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans must start listening to the concerns of our BC fishing families and communities. We must ensure that our children and grandchildren have the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors and participate in an angling tradition that has been a proud way of life for generations.

Bob Zimmer, MP for Prince George – Peace River – Northern Rockies

Ed Fast, MP for Abbotsford

Mel Arnold, MP for North Okanagan – Shuswap