

Wild Salmon Policy Consultations

Phase 1 (November/December 2016)

What we heard in British Columbia

Canada's Policy for Conservation of Wild Salmon (Wild Salmon Policy) was released in 2005 after over six years of consultations and discussions. Following recommendations from the *Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River* (Cohen Commission) and an independent review of the Wild Salmon Policy (WSP) by Gardner Pinfole, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is undertaking the development of an updated, five year WSP implementation plan. As a first step in engaging First Nations, stakeholders and the public, a series of meetings and public open house sessions were held in November and December 2016 in Kamloops, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Nanaimo and Vancouver. Further sessions are being held in Whitehorse, Yukon, in February 2017.

The purpose of these initial consultation sessions has been to provide background on the Wild Salmon Policy and discuss a proposed approach to developing an updated implementation plan. Fisheries and Oceans Canada also asked participants about salmon-related initiatives and work that could inform a five year WSP implementation plan, as well as how they would like to be engaged in developing the implementation plan. The following is a summary of the common themes and recommendations that were shared with Fisheries and Oceans Canada by participants in the consultations during Phase One. This document does not include all of the details of discussions, nor does it provide a response by DFO to the themes/recommendations shared by consultation participants.

Wild Salmon Policy and approach to implementation – overarching comments

There was strong support for Wild Salmon Policy and participants felt that the goal, objectives, and guiding principles, as well as some guidance from the Strategies and Action Steps, continue to be relevant and useful today. Concerns were expressed about the pace of implementation to date, and that a combination of funding constraints, changes to the *Fisheries Act* and reduction in Fisheries and Oceans Canada's habitat staff has not allowed for WSP to be implemented as completely as participants felt was envisioned in 2005. The following comments were provided:

- The WSP and implementation plan must recognize that salmon and access to salmon are integral to the identity, wellbeing, livelihoods, culture, society and economy of First Nations.
- Indigenous rights, treaties, and the government to government relationship must be recognized in an updated WSP and implementation plan, as a number of court cases and modern treaties have been concluded since 2005.
- Conservation, rebuilding and restoration of salmon stocks should be the first priority.
- Most of the focus of WSP implementation to date has been on fisheries management, with the habitat protection elements not being acted upon.

- The impacts of aquaculture and the role of salmon enhancement need to be addressed in the WSP implementation plan.
- The WSP should be implemented at appropriate scales, including at the watershed/sub-watershed level.
- Areas outside of the Fraser Basin (i.e. North coast and Vancouver Island) need to be represented in the implementation plan.
- Steelhead are salmonids but are not included in WSP. They are key to groups in the interior of BC, and are considered in the overall management approach related to salmon returning up the Fraser.
- Guidance from the strategies and action steps of the 2005 WSP should be retained.
- There need to be clear outcomes at the end of the five-year, updated implementation plan.
- The review of the changes to the *Fisheries Act* needs to be considered in work to develop an updated WSP implementation plan.

Approach to development of implementation plan

In the initial round of consultation sessions, Fisheries and Oceans Canada proposed the development of an updated implementation plan to be organized under pillars of assessment work; integrated planning and program delivery; and effective collaboration. Alternatively, it was proposed that collaboration could be an underlying theme rather than a standalone pillar. Participants were asked for their feedback on approaches to developing the updated implementation plan and how they would like to be engaged in this process. The following comments were provided:

- First Nations need to be engaged in the development of an updated WSP implementation plan, not only provided with a draft to comment on. Deep and meaningful consultation is needed with First Nations.
- Best practices, gaps and lessons learned from WSP pilot projects should inform development of the implementation plan.
- Strategies from the 2005 WSP need to be incorporated into the assessment, integrated planning and effective collaboration pillars of the updated implementation plan.
- A way to link projects and/or initiatives already underway should be explored to find synergies and make best use of existing capacity of organizations.
- Stronger WSP connections between DFO, First Nations and stakeholders should be established— perhaps through a joint steering committee on WSP implementation.
- Clear timelines and a process for development of implementation plan should be provided. The use of intention papers should be considered as a first step to generate engagement in development of the plan.

Assessment and monitoring of salmon – Conservation Units

Important work on delineating salmon into Conservation Units (CUs) has been completed with over 460 CUs identified. CU information helps to inform fisheries management decisions, and participants in the sessions also shared how they are using CUs in their own work. Many participants shared their deep

concerns over the number of CUs that are in the red zone, as well as the number of CUs that have not been assessed. The following comments were provided:

- Work on biological status and developing benchmarks must continue and collaboration should occur with First Nations and others on this work.
- Tools, methodologies and capacity between DFO and First Nations are needed in order for data collected to be used effectively in CU status assessments and monitoring.
- There needs to be a commitment to quicker action with respect to CUs that are in the red zone and how to prioritize these.
- There needs to be a way to account for cyclic stocks that have unpredictable returns, but that are listed as green or amber (yellow).
- There needs to be a strategy for keeping green CUs in the green as well as addressing those that are in the yellow or red zones.
- CUs should not be grouped to the point where the biological diversity objective of the WSP could be lost.
- An approach needs to be developed for establishing benchmarks for CUs that are data deficient.
- Core stock assessment work is needed in particular in areas where indicators and data are lacking, including the north and central coast, northern Vancouver Island and the upper Fraser.

Integrated planning and program delivery

Throughout the meetings, participants shared both the successes and lessons learned of various integrated planning initiatives, including the original WSP pilot projects. There was interest in how Strategy 4 of the 2005 WSP document will be captured in the updated plan. The following comments were provided:

- Integrated planning for salmon requires all parties at the table and the process for this may vary in different areas of the Province.
- The Province of BC needs to be engaged as a key party in implementing effective integrated planning, especially with regard to habitat components of the WSP.
- First Nations, through their rights, knowledge, and involvement in assessment work can play a leadership role in bringing parties to the table for integrated planning.
- Effective integrated planning requires strong legislation.
- The following integrated planning initiatives were raised as examples, and potential opportunities to build on:
 - Southern BC Chinook Planning initiative: Covers significant groupings of CUs; is co-lead by DFO and First Nations, with stakeholder involvement.
 - Cowichan roundtable: One of the original WSP pilots with success in bringing municipality, First Nations, Province, DFO and others together to restore Cowichan river.
 - Barclay Sound roundtable: One of the original WSP pilots with success in bringing all harvesters to the table for decision-making on allocation of salmon; also successful stewardship initiatives.

- Environmental Stewardship Initiative in northern BC, established through a government to government agreement between the Province of BC, Carrier Sekani Tribal Council and Carrier Sekani First Nations, is supporting work on a Fisheries Action Plan.
- Nechako Watershed Roundtable is a new collaborative initiative underway since 2015 to protect and improve the health of the Nechako watershed.
- Fraser Salmon Management Council: 68 First Nations on Fraser River and approach area are negotiating a collaborative agreement with DFO in the coming year regarding the management of Fraser salmon stocks.
- There are a number of initiatives in the Skeena watershed: Skeena Watershed initiative, Skeena First Nations Technical Committee and Skeena Fish Forum.

Capacity, resourcing and collaboration to support WSP implementation

Many participants in the sessions expressed their frustration and disappointment that WSP has not received more dedicated funding. And, while there has been more funding for First Nation and community-led work since 2005, there have also been fewer DFO staff in the field. Participants identified some ways that collaboration can support WSP implementation when resources are limited. The following comments were provided:

- There should be WSP accountability at the Associate Regional Director General level that is transparent to the public.
- Dedicated funding for WSP implementation should be put in place.
- There should be better coordination between federal funding programs, including how matching fund requirements can be facilitated for First Nations and community groups.
- There are opportunities on the ground for strategic, coordinated monitoring with First Nations and local stewardship groups, especially if tools, training and capacity partnerships can be established.
- The Aboriginal Guardian program needs to be restored and enhanced with a compliance component for enforcement of contraventions against habitat. This requires training and support for First Nations to do this work in their territories.
- University-based collaborations should be included in the WSP implementation plan.
- Salmon in the Schools program is a key education stewardship opportunity that continues to see cuts to funding, and needs to be restored.
- Opportunities for other or new funding initiatives (like the Fisheries Habitat Restoration Initiative and new Oceans-related funding) should be explored to see if there are opportunities for these new programs to support WSP implementation objectives.
- First Nations require capacity to be able to respond effectively in consultations.

Impacts to salmon

The decline of many salmon stocks was central to many of the participants in the sessions. Better understanding of how changing climate and ocean conditions, as well as the cumulative effects of multiple stressors on salmon stocks and their habitat were raised. The following issues were raised:

- Ocean habitat impacts: changing conditions, plastics.
- Open net pen salmon farming and effects on wild salmon.
- Forestry impacts and the Forest Practices Code in relation to salmon habitat protection.
- Impacts from agricultural, municipal and recreational activities in spawning areas.
- Cumulative effects of energy developments – hydro-electrical, LNG, pipelines.
- Aquatic invasive species (e.g., Quesnel).
- Mining and other discharges (e.g., sewage) into key salmon waterways.
- Better understanding of role of hatcheries in WSP implementation.
- Predation on sockeye fry.
- Methods to reduce impacts from fishing (e.g., mesh size for fishing nets).

Reporting, accountability and performance review

A number of comments were also provided regarding reporting on progress related to WSP implementation and performance review:

- Steps to understand whether work is effective need to be built into the regular reporting process so that a change of course/ further intervention can be taken when necessary.
- Performance indicators needed to capture whether collaborative efforts are effective at implementing the WSP.
- Transparent monitoring and annual reporting should be made available and online to the public in a form that is understandable.