

*A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for
fisheries representatives and their organizations*

Interim Fraser River and Approach Working Group Update - By Marcel Shepert

IFRAWG is an interim planning sub-committee jointly established by First Nations and DFO to plan and prepare for discussions that take place at "THE FORUM", a larger gathering of First Nations, technical advisors and DFO staff. This process was established in 2007 to deal with some fairly serious salmon conservation issues; specifically for First Nations and their food, social and ceremonial requirements. In 2008 and 2009 the process continued. IFRAWG and FORUM do not replace any existing consultation or First Nations fisheries processes.

The purpose of the Forum:

- To build trust amongst First Nations
- To build understanding about each other's fisheries
- To agree upon a set of principles for managing FSC (food/social/ceremonial) fisheries
- To agree upon a set terms of reference to guide the process
- To manage "in-season" FSC fisheries
- To work with DFO to implement the plan
- To seek resources to continue building the process

To date the Forum has dealt primarily with the first two aspects, i.e. understanding and trust building. First Nations have assisted DFO with provisions for exchange of information related to pre-season planning, preparation by First Nations of their fishing plans, input to DFO's integrated harvest plans, and post season reviews; this has helped to further normalize relationships between and amongst First Nations, and between DFO and First Nations. The progress to date can't be minimized, but more work is needed.

IFRAWG and the Forum are interim processes with no mandates. Presently larger First Nations driven Tier 1 initiatives are taking shape, e.g. the First Nations Fisheries Council, and Inter-Tribal Treaty Organization (ITO). Even with these emerging organizations there are still many challenges to overcome. Middle and upper Fraser First Nations are making some headway organizing into aggregate groups which are effective to varying degrees; however, lower Fraser and approach areas still need time to sort out organizational issues within their geopolitical areas. The formation of the ITO and the continued development of the FNFC have not made matters easier for the average fisher person on the ground. They want some certainty about in-season management, or new co-management arrangements that take into account jurisdiction and aboriginal rights; they want to implement a co-management regime, but with all of these processes out there, which one will get the job done? In the end it is up to the regions to ensure their constituency is kept up to date.

Presuming then that the management areas and groups can agree on who belongs with who, i.e. which affiliations and alliances are best suited, the discussion will shift to issues specific to the process, i.e. mandated representation, management principles and in-season management approaches. However, there are still going to be detractors suspicious of any kind of "management framework" which may be used by DFO to set FSC. The question is whether or not this Forum process will minimize DFO's responsibility in terms of title and rights. While the Forum process is primarily about the operational aspects of the fishery, i.e. per-season, and in-season management, it must grapple with other issues, such as the interconnectedness of this and other processes, WSP implementation, improved integrated decision making, FRSSI implications, Fraser Annex renewal, and the role(s) of the ITO.

As empathy and understanding grows, groups have used the opportunity to build relations between First Nations on the island, while building the capacity to participate in the management process. Nowhere was this more visible than with our dealings with chinook and sockeye. There is a dialogue happening and it continues to grow; First Nations are talking about shifting pressure from one species to another – from sockeye to chinook, from salmon to halibut, crabs or

prawns, etc. Reduction in FSC harvest pressure on one species inevitably leads to pressure on other species and other fisheries where First Nations' interests also lie.

IFRAWG had a teleconference on September 29 to discuss the next steps for the forum process. DFO has found resources to support a series of Forum meetings to continue building a "framework". IFRAWG participants have requested that the Paul Kariya report on the Forum process to date be reviewed first before too much time and energy are spent on planning future events. In order to achieve the objective, IFRAWG participants will be meeting in person at DFO headquarters in Vancouver on October 7th. The primary purpose is to begin drafting options on a framework and reviewing the Paul Kariya recommendations, while planning for a full Forum workshop including approach marine and Fraser First Nations on October 15 & 16, at the Executive Inn in Richmond.

The forum will bring together leaders and managers involved in the salmon fishery and in the different processes to share their vision of co-management from the perspectives of the ITO, FNFC, marine/lower Fraser/BC interior, and DFO. The workshop will be important so please plan on attending. There are many issues to deal with, particularly since we are just coming out of serious conservation concerns for the 2009 sockeye situation.

MEETING NOTICES

October 15 & 16, 2009
Fraser Salmon Engagement Process Workshop
Executive Airport Plaza Hotel, Richmond BC

October 26, 2009
Fraser Panel Renegotiation Consultation
Best Western Rainbow Country Inn, Chilliwack BC

October 27, 2009
Fraser Watershed Joint Technical Forum
Best Western Rainbow Country Inn, Chilliwack BC

October 28-30, 2009
First Nations Fisheries Council Fall 2009 Assembly
Chehalis Indian Band, Harrison BC

For more information or to register visit the council website at:
www.fnnfisheriescouncil.ca

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Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat • c/o The Nicola Tribal Association • Box 188 • Merritt, BC • V1K 1B8
 Tel: (604) 836-1909 • Fax: (250) 378-9119 • E-mail: aimee@nicolatribal.org • Web: www.frafs.ca