

NEWS RELEASE

Harper government sells-out BC rural fishermen to powerful U.S. interests during prorogued Parliament

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / January 8, 2008

UCLUELET, BC - Rural fishermen on the West Coast of Vancouver Island are outraged at Ottawa's recent deal, as part of a renewed Pacific Salmon Treaty, that cuts the Canadian Chinook salmon commercial catch by at least 50 percent for ten years and leaves Canadian fishermen with only \$30 million in compensation.

Estimates place the direct value of this 50 percent Canadian catch reduction at \$100 million over ten years, plus another \$200 million generated in economic multipliers through processing and fishing fleet activity.

"I'm shocked that the Harper government would undemocratically force through this international agreement during a prorogued Parliament," says Doug Kimoto, a Ucluelet-based fisherman who owns an Area G licence that permits commercial troll fishing on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. "We were repeatedly assured that this important treaty could not be signed until Parliament was sitting. There is no urgency or reason to ram through this agreement."

"Ottawa deliberately left the regional commercial fishing seat empty on the negotiating team. The actual fishermen who'll be negatively impacted by this treaty were never allowed to be a party to the actual negotiation yet they are the only ones taking a hit," adds Dan Edwards, a local fisherman and long-time community activist from Ucluelet.

"The government hasn't even bothered to do a socio-economic analysis on the impacts on this treaty on rural fishermen and our communities," Edwards adds. "These fish are being reallocated to Americans under the guise of conservation. Ottawa cannot justify the sale of our jobs and our access to natural resources, and certainly not at rock bottom prices!"

The entire reduction of Chinook salmon catches on the West Coast of Vancouver Island is expected to come from commercial troll fishermen who own an Area G licence. Without a proper socio-economic impact study, these fishermen are concerned they will not be adequately compensated for their economic losses. Fishermen are concerned that because they oppose the principle of selling out Canada's resources, they will be punished and not be fairly compensated. Repeated requests to discuss their concerns with the Minister of Fisheries are being refused.

"This is a bad deal and will sell-out rural Canadians to big American power companies," Kimoto says.

American fishermen and U.S. hydroelectric power companies drove the deal with threats of lawsuits against their own federal government prior to the actual negotiations. American power companies and fishermen are expected to reap from this

Chinook agreement more than \$400 million a year in extra hydroelectric power and salmon catches. Alaskan fishermen are only reducing their catch by 15 percent under this new agreement.

Both Alaska's 15 percent reduction and Canada's 30 percent reduction will mean more Chinook to the Columbia River making it easier for U.S. hydro companies and American commercial fishermen to comply with the U.S. Endangered Species Act, which protects several depleted Chinook salmon runs. However, the Canada-U.S. salmon agreement does not force American governments and power companies to rebuild and protect habitat that is the real cause of the problem and necessary to save salmon.

"This deal is a complete sell-out of Canadian interests under the guise of conservation for a measly \$30 million and is particularly terrible considering the present economic gloom," Edwards says.

"With forestry declining due to the collapse in the U.S. housing market, BC's rural economic opportunities are shrinking and yet Ottawa is deliberately destroying one of our remaining valuable and sustainable resources. I suspect that in Ottawa's eyes good relations with the United States trumps the rights of a few bankrupted rural fishermen and their rural communities."

Regional representatives and the affected fishermen continue to ask and be denied a meeting with the Minister of Fisheries when she will be in BC in the next few weeks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Dan Edwards, Ucluelet fisherman and community activist, cell: (250) 266-0082

Doug Kimoto, Area G Troll fisherman in Ucluelet, cell: (250) 726-5011

Kathy Scarfo, President of the Area G Troll Association, tel: (250) 653-9207 or cell: (250) 537-7766