

PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2008.05.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
BYLINE: Judith Lavoie

Salmon deal fatal to fleet, critics say; Proposed cut to catch would wipe out Island communities, they charge

The West Coast Vancouver Island troll fleet will be annihilated and small coastal communities irreparably damaged if Canada agrees to cut the chinook salmon catch off the west coast of Vancouver Island by 30 per cent, critics said yesterday.

The Island fleet is being asked to take the hit without adequate compensation or guarantees stocks will be conserved once the fish reach Oregon and Washington, fishermen, politicians and business owners said.

On Thursday, the Pacific Salmon Commission recommended a bilateral agreement between Canada and the U.S. that would cut the chinook harvest by almost one-third, starting next year and lasting until 2018.

There are now 160 boats in the fleet, said Kathy Scarfo of the West Coast Trollers Association. If the cut is ratified, there will be enough fish to support only 15 boats, she said.

The commission also recommended Alaska take a 15 per cent cut in chinook salmon and the U.S pay Canada \$30 million, which could be used to buy out fishing licences.

That raises sovereignty issues, Scarfo said.

"As far as I know, it is the first time a foreign nation has come in and bought our natural resources," she said. "Instead of closing down terminal fisheries in Oregon and Washington or repairing the [habitat] damage they have done, they are saying, 'If we get your fish, that will fix it.'"

After 18 months of negotiation, the commission, a joint U.S.-Canada body, recommended the cut as part of a renewed Pacific Salmon Treaty.

The federal government will make a decision after consultations this summer and fall, said Paul Macgillivray of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Many stocks harvested off the west coast of the Island are endangered species returning to Washington and Oregon, and conservation efforts will benefit Island fishermen because there will be more fish in future, Macgillivray said.

Catherine Bell, North Island New Democrat MP, said capacity will be lost as boats are tied up. "If you take your boat out of the water for 10 years, you're not going to put it back if there's an opening and there's no guarantee there will be conservation in the U.S.," she said.

"We are really selling out our ability to fish in the future."

The West Coast Aquatic Management Board voted yesterday to ask the commission to appoint an independent overseer. The board wants to co-ordinate compensation money if the cuts are implemented, said Dan Edwards, a labour representative on the board.

Ucluelet Mayor Dianne St. Jacques said it would have a substantial impact.

"It's another nail in the coffin [of the industry]," she said.

Keith Fraser, owner of the Zeballos fuel dock, said most of his customers are trollers.

"The troll fleet operates out of all these small little villages on the west coast and they would all be dramatically affected," he said.

jlavoie@tc.canwest.com