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Salmon deal sells out fishermen, B.C. trollers say U.S. to pay Canada \$30-million in compensation for lost fishing rights in what some are calling 'sweetheart deal'

JUSTINE HUNTER VICTORIA **Commercial fishermen in B.C. are being sold out for a pittance under a proposed Canada-U.S. settlement on Pacific salmon, angry trollers say.**

Under the 10-year conservation pact, the United States will pay Canada \$30-million in compensation for lost fishing rights, money that will help ease the pain of Vancouver Island fishermen who will lose their livelihood under the deal.

"It's absolutely shocking," said Kathy Scarfo of the West Coast Trollers Association. **"Here we have a Canadian natural resource, the U.S. needs it because, let's face it, they have destroyed their habitat . . . so instead of paying the price, they are buying ours. And it's a sweetheart deal."**

The Pacific Salmon Commission proposal, which is not expected to be finalized until the end of the year, covers five species of salmon that range from Alaska down to Oregon. But the most contentious piece is the effort to protect chinook stocks.

"The parties agree to share in the burden of conservation," the deal signed this week states. But Alaskan fishermen will see their harvest levels drop by 15 per cent, while off the west coast of Vancouver Island, the cut is 30 per cent. And for B.C.'s commercial fishery, the cut will be more severe once native and sports fishermen get their priority shares.

"For the fishing communities that are just barely hanging on already, this will be the end of them," predicted Dan Edwards of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, after a meeting yesterday afternoon in Port Alberni with native and commercial fishermen. "People here are pretty angry." He estimated the commercial value of the salmon that will be lost to Canadian fishermen will be closer to \$100-million over the life of the deal. There are about 100 active trollers

left on the coast now, he said, but predicted the majority will be squeezed out under the terms of this pact.

Members of the Pacific Salmon Commission, representing Canada and the United States, spent 18 months working out the details of the plan that aims to replace a 1999 deal that expires at the end of the year.

Canadian commission member Paul Macgillivray, with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, said the cash payment from the United States is highly unusual but he pushed for it at every meeting over the past 12 months.

"This is a good agreement for both Canada and the United States," he said.

The top issue for the U.S. negotiators was reducing the B.C. harvest of Chinook salmon that migrate from Washington's rivers and streams north to the marine waters of British Columbia and southeast Alaska.

The current chairman of the commission, Jeff Koenings, is also director of Washington State's Fish and Wildlife Department. He did not return calls yesterday but issued a joint statement with Washington Governor Chris Gregoire.

"With this agreement, we make a substantial down payment in our efforts to return Washington's weak wild chinook salmon populations back to sustainable levels," Mr. Koenings said.

Mr. Gregoire welcomed the deal, saying it will dramatically boost the number of Chinook salmon returning to Puget Sound and the Columbia River, runs that have been listed for protection under the U.S.

Endangered Species Act.

But Jeffery Young, an aquatic biologist from the David Suzuki Foundation and an observer to the negotiations, wasn't convinced the deal will do enough to protect salmon stocks.

"It's neutral. They took an antiquated treaty and tweaked it," he said. "The cuts they made are necessary, however unfortunate they are for some communities."