

DISASTER IN THE FISHERY: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE - EAST & WEST

INTRODUCTION

The government has responded quickly to the collapse of lobster prices. Federal Fisheries Minister Shea announced that the federal government would spend \$10 million marketing Atlantic lobster in an effort to reduce the high inventory and help prices ease upward.

Defence Minister Mackay acknowledged 'there's no easy quick fix solution' to the problems facing the lobster industry but confirmed that the federal government is looking to come up with a package that will work for all involved.

Liberal fisheries critic Gerry Byrne is calling for licences and monitoring fees to be rescinded. Others have proposed various schemes to buy-back lobster licences.

All this is in stark contrast to the West Coast where government policies over the last decade and a half, not markets, have devastated the commercial salmon fishery on the Fraser River and impoverished a once vibrant and profitable industry.

Fishing families have lost up to **80 percent** of their former income.

This year's fishery is critical to the commercial salmon fishing fleet. There has been no catch at all for Fraser River fishermen in 5 out of the past 10 years and the fishery is expected to be closed again in 2010.

Even in the years in which the fishery was open, access to the salmon stocks by the public commercial salmon fleet in the Fraser has declined by more than 70% as fish were reallocated from the public commercial fishery to the aboriginal fishery without compensation.

REALLOCATION

- From the 1880's to 1985-- the Native subsistence fishery in the Fraser River took on average about **3 percent** of the total Canadian harvest of Fraser River sockeye salmon.
- Between 1996 and 2008, the Native catch increased to **73 percent** of all the Fraser sockeye caught in the Fraser River.
- As a result of this reallocation the Area E fishing community—the group licensed to commercially fish in the Fraser—fell to only **23 percent** over the same period.

ECONOMIC DISLOCATION/IMPACT

Prior to 1992, the year in which the separate aboriginal commercial fishery was established, the Fraser River sockeye fishery was the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world.

- In the 12 years prior to 1992, commercial sockeye fleet harvested an average of **7.1 million** sockeye per year worth **\$210 million** in wholesale value (no economic multiplier has been added).
- In the last twelve years, the public commercial fleet harvest fell to **2.1 million** sockeye or **\$63 million** annually. This represents a loss to B.C. fishing families and processors of \$150 million per year.
- Things are not improving. In the last six years the public commercial fishing fleet harvested on average only **967,000** Fraser sockeye worth or **\$29 million**.
- The lives of B.C. fishing families and their communities have been devastated as they watched the wholesale value of their fish dropping from \$120 million 17 years ago to \$29 million today as a direct result of government action.

FAILURE TO COMPENSATE

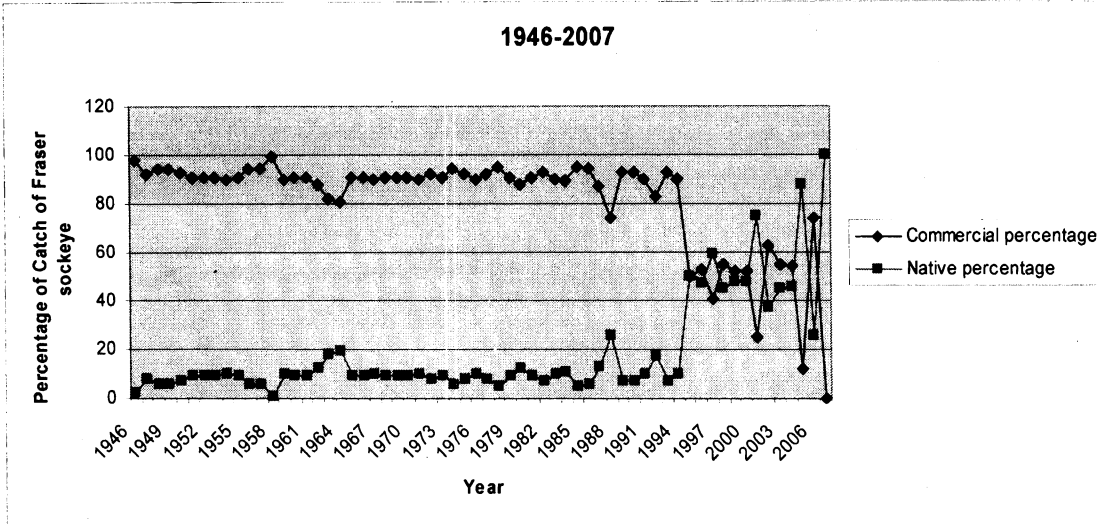
- Government efforts to compensate Fraser River commercial fishermen for the loss of over 70 percent of their access to the fishery have been shameful.
- In 1992 government purchases of licenses to offset the reallocation of fish from the commercial fishery represented roughly 1 percent of coast-wide catch capacity.
- The fleet Restructuring Program which operated between 1996 and 2000 was designed to complement the Department's area licensing scheme, not to offset the transfer of much of the fishery to the native-only fisheries.

LOSS OF VALUE

- For 17 years commercially licensed small boat fishermen both native and non-native have sat on the beach while others harvested fish that was once their allocation. To add insult to injury they also were forced to sit idle while the Department allowed fish in excess of spawning requirements swim by to accommodate the needs of poachers.
- Through all of this they had to pay moorage, upkeep on their boats and licence fees whether they fished or not.
- Many of these fishermen are now reaching retirement age. Their boats which have a replacement cost of roughly \$225-250,000 and their licences which have sold in the past for roughly \$120,000 today have no value. With no sockeye fishery in 5 out of the last 10 years no one is buying - but the maintenance, moorage and licence fees go on.

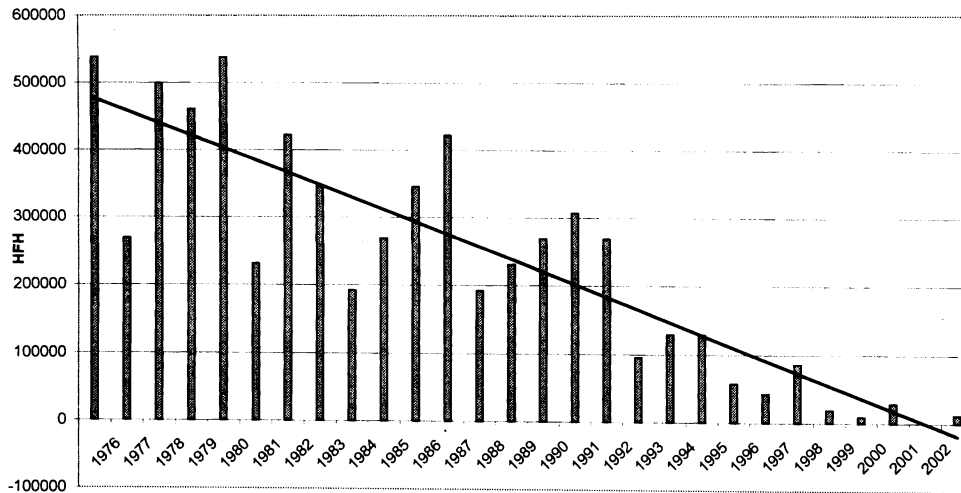
THE DECLINE IN THE FRASER RIVER SOCKEYE FISHERY

Graph I
Fraser River Sockeye
Percentage of Run Caught in Public Commercial versus Native-only Fisheries



Graph I shows the decline in public commercial fishery catches and the dramatic increase in native catches.

Graph II
Decline in Fraser River Gillnetter Fishing Effort
(per hundred fathom hours)



Graph II shows the decline in fish time for commercial fishermen in the Fraser River from 1978 to 2002. The decline for 2003 to 2008 is even more dramatic as the fishery was closed in 2005, 2007 and 2008.