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Future of Pacific Salmon Treaty in Doubt

OTTAWA—“The future of the Pacific Salmon Commission is in doubt as a result of the continued refusal of the United States to fund its obligations under the Canada-US Pacific Salmon Treaty,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond). “Vital scientific work has been curtailed at the Commission and the work of its scientists jeopardized.”

The Pacific Salmon Treaty has been a barometer of Canada’s standing in Washington and the priority Ottawa places on West Coast problems since the treaty was signed in 1985 by President Regan and Prime Minister Mulroney. During the early years of Jean Chretien’s government salmon wars with the US were an annual event. Now the United States has declined to fund the treaty secretariat.

Last year Alaskan Senator Murkowski asked US Secretary of State Powell to reopen the Salmon Treaty in response to British Columbia’s decision to lift the moratorium on salmon farm expansion. The Senator is now Governor of Alaska. His daughter has been named to fill his seat in the US Senate. Alaska’s senior senator, Ted Stevens is Chair of the power Senate Appropriations Committee.

While Alaskan Governor Frank Murkowski and Alaskan Senators Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski are likely to support continuation of the Canada-US treaty, they are known to have grave reservations about the failure of Canada and British Columbia to control the serious environmental impacts of farmed salmon on wild salmon stocks so vital to the Alaskan economy.

The US Congress cut funding to the Pacific Salmon Commission in March, refusing to provide funds for the operation of the treaty secretariat for fiscal year 2003. In July the House Appropriations Committee refused to fund the Commission for 2004 and raised the possibility of a US “withdrawal.” Without US funding the Commission has limped along by cutting back its monitoring of salmon stocks and canceling meetings of its technical working committees on various species of salmon and the publication of its scientific reports.

In the past twelve months, the Prime Minister’s Press Secretary called President Bush a moron and former Fisheries Minister Herb Dhaliwal referred to Bush as a failed statesman.

“The Pacific Salmon Treaty has fallen victim to the continued chilly relations between Ottawa and Washington. Both the Prime Minister and the Fisheries Minister have remained silent as the lights are being turned out at the Pacific Salmon Commission. Canada desperately needs a government that places a priority on protecting our fish stocks,” concluded Cummins.

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