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Fishery Officers Face Threats to Their Safety

Delta, B.C. —“Greg Savard, Director of Conservation and Protection for Fisheries and Oceans in the Pacific Region, is misleading the public when he downplays the violent reaction of Cheam fishermen to DFO enforcement efforts,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-Richmond East).

The fact, which can be easily verified, is that when a DFO boat approaches a Cheam vessel engaged in an illegal driftnet fishery other Cheam vessels leave the beach area of the reserve to swarm and ram the DFO boat. This attempt to intimidate of fishery officers is not unprecedented.

In May of 2003, fishery officers were attacked when undertaking a vehicle patrol of illegal Cheam fishing. On that occasion Sidney Douglas Sr. threatened the officers with a club. Three officers were held hostage until freed by RCMP negotiators. Instead of supporting the fishery officers, DFO management had the RCMP investigate the actions of the fishery officers. No Cheam were ever charged.

Fearing for their safety, fishery officers refused to carry out enforcement patrols from May 2003 until September 2004. The Canada Labour Code allows fishery officers to refuse to undertake patrols when they believe working conditions are unsafe.

In a January 11, 2005 memo the Detachment Supervisor for Conservation and Protection Field Units in Mission and Chilliwack requested “weapons profiles” on poachers with whom his men have to deal so that they will not be faced with any “surprises”:

“In your report you indicated that you have weapon profiles on individuals we deal with. Can you pass those along so I can have that information on to the officers to ensure we have no surprises?”

After the lawlessness on the Fraser and the near destruction of the sockeye in 2004, the Minister of Fisheries promised that 2005 would be different. He promised there would be a significantly increased number of fishery officers on the water and that illegal fishing would be a thing of the past.

“The Cheam again openly flout the law. Fish stocks are again under threat. DFO denies there is a problem and makes feeble efforts to end illegal fishing all the while presiding over the destruction of the fishery resource. Sadly nothing has changed,” concluded Cummins.

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