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News Release

May 10, 2005

No Money for Fishery Officers Yet DFO Had Surplus For Washrooms at Cheam Fishing Sites

Ottawa—“Fisheries policy in British Columbia is driven by fear of violence by natives according to Larry Murray, the Deputy Minister of Fisheries,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-Richmond East).

Murray was responding to information provided to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans by Cummins who had advised the Committee of the following facts:

- During the hearings by Williams inquiry in Kamloops a fishery officer advised that present staffing levels coupled with budget and overtime restrictions had “crippled Conservation & Protection (enforcement activities) in my field unit.”
- DFO documents received under the *Access to Information Act* revealed that fishery officers sought “weapons profiles” on individuals in the Cheam area so as to avoid nasty surprises.

In spite of budget shortfalls and fear of armed poachers DFO spent \$20,000 to install “2 pre-cast washroom facilities at Cheam salmon fishing sites.” The Deputy Minister described this expenditure as “part of an outreach.”

- In Prince George fishery officers advised the Williams committee that budget cuts had eroded their ability to conduct patrols. Of their 10 vehicles only two have less than a quarter million kilometers and many are not dependable enough to conduct night time patrols.
- Nevertheless *Access to Information* documents reveal that in 2004 the Department identified “surplus” funds which allowed many bands to request more money. The Tsawwassen Indian Band received \$12,500 toward the purchase of a vehicle.

Faced with these outrageous facts the Deputy Minister acknowledged the number of fishery officers in BC was being cut by 24 as a result of the latest budget and that 6 officers would be cut from the lower Fraser alone, the hotspot for illegal activity. The Deputy Minister made light of the government’s cuts to the number of Fishery Officers in the field claiming that enforcement of the Fisheries Act has “got to be a lot more effective than just a few more fisheries officers.”

In spite of evidence to the contrary the Deputy Minister would have us believe that “relationship building” trumps law enforcement. He maintains that when working with Indian bands “the compliance regime on the lower Fraser has got to be ... a lot more outreaching than simply hammering people.” Remarkably the Deputy Minister of Fisheries characterizes enforcing the *Fisheries Act* as “hammering people.”

“This distorted logic contradicts the two latest reports on the Fraser by the Commons Fisheries Committee and the Williams report. It flies in the face of common sense that tells us that looking the other way when the law is being broke undermines respect for the law and will lead to further law breaking,” concluded Cummins.

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