

CRITICAL FLAWS IN THE PROPOSED *WILD SALMON POLICY*

Prepared by the Marine Conservation Caucus Salmon Committee, February 2005

Conservation groups have prepared (or are currently preparing) a range of responses to the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO) proposed *Wild Salmon Policy*. Here, the focus is on the *Policy's* failure to: (1) adequately define conservation, and establish the priority of conservation, (2) protect habitat, (3) establish adequate spawning escapement goals, harvest rules, and decision-making protocols, (4) address the biological, economic and social risks posed by salmon farms and hatcheries, (5) adequately resource the process, and (6) use clear language.

The following 10 points summarize these flaws, and offer alternatives which must be addressed, before the policy proceeds.

1. Conservation is poorly defined, and the *Policy's* language overtly sabotages the conservation priority. By treating conservation as being merely one of several competing values, DFO advertises its inability or unwillingness to tackle the main challenge it faces in delivering an acceptable policy.

Conservation must be well defined, and identified as *the* priority.

2. There is no explicit commitment to the protection of salmon habitat. In fact, DFO has indicated that it may willingly sacrifice salmon habitat that does not serve production purposes.

A liberal and generous interpretation of habitat and a commitment to its protection in whole is required; habitat protection must become an enforceable policy objective.

3. By sidestepping the fact that spawning escapement goals and harvest rules must reflect biodiversity and ecosystem values (including the ecological contributions of salmon), and by condoning the over-fishing of fragile stocks (see the "amber and red zone" rationalization), the *Policy* retreats from the selective fishing policy, subordinates the long-term needs of salmon to the short-term desire to overharvest, and endangers many of the province's small stocks of wild salmon.

Protecting weak salmon stocks must be a higher priority than trying to achieve unsustainably high harvest rates—no matter how much harvesters or managers might disagree.

4. Decision-making rules are ambiguous or deferred (downloaded) to complex decision-making structures that seem certain to be overwhelmed by interests "most affected by decisions" (i.e. industry). These structures are also being

asked to produce “balanced outcomes,” without being bound by clearly articulated conservation objectives. This leaves DFO largely unaccountable for decisions, abandons the precautionary principle, and sanctions ecological loss for short-term economic gain.

Clear conservation-based decision-making rules bound by conservation objectives (not balanced outcomes) are required. DFO must also commit to implementation planning that is conservation-based and not interest-based.

5. By failing to require that management action address either the ultimate or proximate causes of specific declines of stocks within conservation units, and by suggesting that the DFO has a “full range” of options for combating CU declines (presumably hatcheries and other artificial enhancement means), the *Policy* surrenders DFO management to expediency and politics rather than upholding science-based policy, and opens the door for ongoing declines.

DFO must be unambiguously committed to addressing the causes of salmon declines and to using conservation-based approaches in restoring red-zoned CUs (i.e., not hatcheries).

6. The *Policy’s* failure to address the internationally recognized and well-publicized risks associated with salmon hatcheries and salmon farms is particularly odious. The weight of evidence suggests that hatcheries and farms are harmful not only to BC’s wild salmon but to ecosystems and the people who rely on them.

To serve the public interest, the federal government must prevent DFO from permitting, supporting and encouraging unsustainable activities.

7. The woeful insufficiency of resources raises suspicions about the intent driving the WSP. The continually declining levels of funding and staffing for science, management, enforcement, and stock assessment make one doubt the stated intentions of the *Policy* and raise suspicions as to its true intent.

Adequate resources must be provided for a successful WSP and for DFO to carry out its conservation mandate.

8. The language of the WSP is often unclear and/or deliberately vague.

The policy should be re-written and edited for clarity.

9. The *Policy* ignores recent aboriginal case law that is expected to influence resource management decisions.

The policy must be linked to aboriginal case law around resource management.

10. The WSP changes the intent of the Precautionary Principle from ensuring that protection of living systems remains *the* priority to acknowledging that every decision contains an element of risk.

The WSP must restore the Precautionary Principle's primacy: that the WSP opposes whatever damages ecosystems, in whole or in part.