



Pacific Region Suite 200 – 401 Burrard Street Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 3S4	Région du Pacifique Piece 200 – 401 rue Burrard Vancouver (C-B.) V6C 3S4
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December 22, 2020

To First Nations and Stakeholders,

**Re: Salmon 2021/2022 Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs) for Northern and Southern British Columbia (BC)**

This letter is intended to communicate the Department's key planning priorities for developing the 2021/2022 Northern and Southern BC Salmon IFMPs and alert you to important dates and deadlines for this year's process. Specifically, this letter identifies areas where potential fishery management changes are under consideration or substantial discussion on current management approaches is expected for the 2021 season (see Appendix 1 for details).

Further discussion with First Nations and advisory groups on these priority topics will take place during the consultation process to develop the 2021/22 salmon IFMPs. Additional details on specific changes to inform discussions will be identified in the draft IFMPs that will be released at the end of February. If you wish to provide feedback on the planning priorities identified in this letter or other areas where you seek to propose changes for the IFMPs, you are requested to provide feedback in writing by **January 15, 2021** to the DFO Pacific Salmon Management Team at:

[DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDuoPacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDuoPacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca).

The Department intends to share all feedback received with First Nations and stakeholders during meetings in late January / February to support discussion of priorities outlined and other changes that have been identified in feedback to inform development of the draft IFMPs. Salmon IFMPs are developed annually; the plans currently in place are effective June 1, 2020 to May 31, 2021. The process to develop the salmon IFMPs is consistent with national guidelines for all IFMPs (see <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/peches-fisheries/ifmp-gmp/index-eng.htm>).

The current 2020/2021 Salmon IFMPs are available at:

Southern BC – <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/40881404.pdf>

Northern BC – <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/40881398.pdf>

Below is a table outlining the important dates for the development of the salmon IFMPs for the coming year.

### 2020-2021 Salmon IFMPs Process Timelines

Activity	Proposed Timelines
Salmon Post Season Review Meetings All First Nations and stakeholders invited to attend.	Northern – December 3-4, 2020 Southern - December 16, 2020
2021 Salmon Outlook All First Nations and stakeholders invited to attend.	December 17, 2020
Release of DFO IFMP Planning Letter Letter Identifying key planning priorities and timelines for 2021/22 season	December 22, 2020
Deadline for written submissions from First Nations and advisory groups on issues identified in the DFO IFMP letter.	January 15, 2021
Deadline for new CSAF proposals	January 29, 2021
Meetings to review and discuss potential changes to IFMPs and opportunity for focussed discussion on key IFMP issues.	FN Forum - February 2-4, 2021 Northern IHPC – February 3, 2021 Southern IHPC - February 4, 2021
Draft IFMPs released for public review & comment	Last week of February 2021
Meetings to review draft IFMP	FN Forum - March 2-4, 2021 Northern IHPC – March 4, 2021 Southern IHPC - March 5, 2021
2021 Revised Salmon Outlook	April 6, 2021
Deadline to submit comments on draft IFMP (30 day comment period).	April 9, 2021
Final Meetings for discussion on IFMP feedback.	FN Forum - Apr 20-22, 2021 Full IHPC - April 28-29, 2021
Target for public release of salmon IFMP	June 30, 2021

The key planning priorities for the 2021 season are listed in Appendix 1. The Department is looking for feedback on any proposed changes that the First Nations and stakeholders would like considered during the IFMP planning process.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all meetings will likely occur over conference call and/or webinar. Meeting invitations and details will be sent out as they become available.

Yours sincerely,

DFO Pacific Salmon Management Team

[DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDpacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDpacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca).

Appendix (1):

1. Key planning priorities for the 2021 season

## Key Planning Priorities for the 2021 Season:

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### General

#### 1. Pacific Salmon Outlook

For 2021, DFO Science will continue to make changes to the Outlook document in order to:

- Align CU groupings with stock management units (SMUs) to better inform decision-making consistent with Fish Stock provisions in the Fisheries Act and IFMP requirements.
- For those SMUs with statistical forecasts, consolidate and report them in the Outlook.
- For those SMUs without statistical forecasts, standardize the interpretation of SMU status in relation to outlook categories;
- Add information regarding leading indicators and previous year returns.

The goal of these changes is to produce a document that provides more useful and relevant information to inform management decisions. As a result of these changes, the final document will not be available until April 2021. A preliminary version will be circulated in December/January.

#### 2. Big Bar Landslide

In 2020, monitoring passage through the slide indicates that an impediment to natural passage remains at higher water flows which has significant impacts on the early arriving Early Stuart Fraser Sockeye and Early timed Spring Fraser Chinook Internal and external experts have determined that additional work is

required to fully remediate natural fish passage at the slide site and it was recommended that a permanent fishway be installed.

On Dec. 9, 2020 the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Honorable Bernadette Jordan announced that Peter Kiewit Sons ULC was awarded the contract to construct a permanent fishway , this work will commence in early January, 2021 to take advantage of the lower winter water levels and is anticipated to be completed for the 2022 salmon migration.

In 2020, significant efforts were made to protect early migrating salmon stocks by three primary measures: 1. Construct temporary in-river rock features to improve migration conditions; 2. implement a trap and transport program to move salmon over the slide; and 3. conduct an emergency conservation enhancement program. As part of the enhancement program, approx. 400 adult early Stuart and Bowron sockeye were captured at the slide site and taken to DFO facilities where their progeny are being reared until release in 2021. Additionally, targeted early timed Fraser Spring Chinook were taken both at the slide site and natively and reared at a number of DFO hatcheries and the Quesnel River Research Center. This work is being conducted in close collaboration with the Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance and in partnership with UNBC and the FFSBC. The Chinook will also be reared and released in 2021.

With the construction of a permanent fishway scheduled for completion in the spring of 2022, planning for the 2021 salmon migration continues. Lessons learned from the 2019 and 2020 programs will inform adjustments to the trap and transport and emergency enhancement programs for the upcoming salmon migration.

### **3. First Nations Food, Social and Ceremonial Fishery Opportunities**

Conservation of salmon populations is the primary objective in managing the resource. After conservation requirements are met, the Department is committed to respecting Constitutional and Treaty obligations to provide priority access for First Nations Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) harvest opportunities. It is anticipated that conservation measures or low returns for many salmon populations, particularly those returning to the Fraser River and Skeena River, may constrain First Nations FSC harvest opportunities while stocks of concern migrate through fishing areas. In 2020, many First Nations fisheries in Southern BC and the Fraser River were highly constrained into late July and August to protect at risk Fraser River Chinook and protect very poor Fraser sockeye returns; fishing opportunities in the fall were also constrained by window closures to protect Interior Fraser Coho and Thompson/Chilcotin Steelhead.

For 2021, pre-season fishing plans will need to consider on-going conservation concerns and constraints for FSC harvest opportunities. Departmental staff will consult with First Nations on fishing plans that achieve conservation objectives and FSC fishery opportunities to provide for harvest of small numbers of fish for ceremonial purposes (particularly when stocks of concern may be impacted), as well as more abundant stocks and/or surpluses that are identified. Input will be sought on FSC sharing arrangements for circumstances in which Fraser River sockeye returns are not adequate to provide for full First Nations FSC access. Additional restrictions in commercial and recreational fisheries will likely be required to provide for First Nations harvest opportunities. Pre-season and in-season plans to address these concerns will be discussed with First Nations and stakeholders as part of the IFMP development process.

For Fraser River salmon, the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement was signed on July 5, 2019 by the Minister and the President of the Fraser Salmon Management Council. The Fraser Salmon

Management Council is a mandated body with First Nations membership from throughout the Fraser watershed and approach waters. The agreement sets out a governance framework that will support engagement, decision making and recommendations relating to management of Fraser salmon. The Department is working with the Fraser Salmon Management Board (FSMB) to develop a work plan and it is anticipated this process will support planning for the 2021 season.

#### 4. COSEWIC and SARA Process

Over 60 salmon and two anadromous trout designatable units (DUs) have been recently, or will soon be, assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). COSEWIC's submission of its assessments to the Government of Canada, via its annual report, initiates the process to determine whether or not to list a species under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). For regular (non-emergency) processes, the Governor in Council (Cabinet) may, on the recommendation of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, add the species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk; decide not to add the species to the List; or refer the matter back to COSEWIC.

To inform the recommendation and final listing decision, DFO prepares the following regional information: a Recovery Potential Assessment (science advice); management scenarios (outlining measures to potentially be taken if the species is or is not listed); Indigenous Cultural Significance information; a Cost-Benefit Analysis; and consultations with First Nations, Stakeholders, ENGOs, Provinces and Territories, and the general public. Management Scenarios outline measures that would potentially be taken under a "Do Not List" or a "List" outcome; the latter will include a focus on how SARA prohibitions may impact fisheries. Consultations to solicit input from First Nations, Stakeholders, ENGOs, Provinces and Territories, and the general public are undertaken prior to submitting a regional recommendation for consideration in a final SARA listing decision.

Additional details can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry.html>.

Species	# of DUs*	COSEWIC Assessment Date	COSEWIC Status	COSEWIC Annual Report Date
Sakinaw Sockeye	1	2016 (April)	EN	Oct 2016
Interior Fraser Coho	1	2016 (November)	TH	Oct 2017
Okanagan Chinook	1	2017 (April)	EN	Oct 2017
Fraser Sockeye (Group I)	24	2017 (November)	8 EN, 2 TH, 5 SC, 9 NAR	Oct 2018
Southern BC Chinook (Group I)	16	2018 (November)	8 EN, 4 TH, 1 SC, 1 NAR, 2 DD	Oct 2019
Southern BC Chinook (Group II)	12	2020 (November)	4 EN, 3 TH, 1, SC, 1 NAR, 3 DD	Anticipated Oct 2021

Steelhead Trout (Thompson & Chilcotin) Regular re-assessment**	2	2020 (November)	2 EN	Anticipated Oct 2021
Fraser Sockeye (Group II)	7	2021 (April)	TBD	Anticipated Oct 2021

EN – Endangered

TH – Threatened

SC – Special Concern

NAR – Not at Risk

DD – Data Deficient

\*DU refers to “designatable unit” or population. DUs and Wild Salmon Policy Conservation Units are similar, and in most cases, the same

\*\*underwent an Emergency Assessment in 2018, as per SARA S.28 (1).

Further information on the SARA listing process can be found at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-act-accord-funding/listing-process/act.html>

## 5. Commercial Salmon Allocation Framework (CSAF) Demonstration Fisheries.

The Department is continuing to implement existing and review new CSAF demonstration fisheries proposals through the IFMP process. CSAF demonstration fishery proposals are intended to provide increased flexibility for harvesters to fish their commercial salmon shares. CSAF demonstration fishery proposals are assessed through an Evaluation Framework which outlines Departmental objectives and were developed with support from the SCC and CSAB.

The Department is requesting confirmation of continued interest in existing and submission of any new demonstration fishery proposals be submitted by proponents to [DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumondupacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumondupacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca) and their local Fisheries Manager **no later than January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021**. As in previous years, this is to ensure sufficient time for the Department to evaluate the proposals and provide an opportunity for feedback and discussion through the draft IFMP consultation process. Demonstration fishery proposals that are not submitted by this deadline will not be considered for the 2020 season.

## Southern BC

### 6. Chinook

In 2020, DFO implemented fisheries management measures to support the recovery of at-risk Fraser River Chinook populations (see details here: <https://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/salmon-saumon/fraser-chin-mgmt-gest-quin-eng.html>). These measures were developed following consultation with First Nations communities, recreational and commercial fishing organizations and environmental organizations. Building on management measures from 2019, DFO implemented highly precautionary fishery restrictions intended to provide a high degree of protection to at-risk Fraser Spring 4<sub>2</sub>, Spring 5<sub>2</sub> and Summer 5<sub>2</sub> Chinook returning in 2020. The management objective was to allow as many fish to pass through to the spawning grounds as possible, which was expected to reduce overall Canadian fishery mortalities on these populations to very low levels approaching 5% (note, the actual outcomes may vary around this target given uncertainties in the data). A review of whether the 2020 fishery management measures achieved these management targets will require an assessment of coded-wire tag data, stock

composition information, and an evaluation of impacts of the Big Bar rockslide; information to support this assessment is expected to be available beginning in late March/April 2021.

For 2021, ongoing precautionary fishery management actions to support conservation and promote rebuilding of these stocks will be needed. This will require continued restrictions and/or closures to fisheries in times and areas where these stocks are encountered in Northern and Southern BC including First Nations, recreational and commercial fisheries in marine areas and the Fraser River.

Additional discussion will also be required on management measures that may be needed to address other Chinook stocks of concern and Pacific Salmon Treaty obligations for specified Chinook stocks.

Management measures identified in the current Salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (currently in effect until May 31, 2021) will need to be reviewed to consider potential fishery opportunities that were proposed in 2020 for implementation beginning April/May 2021. Specifically, the Department intends to evaluate potential fishery opportunities for consistency with conservation, fishery and other objectives using an evaluation framework to identify potential concerns and will share this information during consultations to inform decision making.

Any new management measures that may be considered will be outlined in the draft 2021/22 IFMP that covers the period from June 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022.

DFO is also continuing to work with First Nations and stakeholders to identify additional activities to support rebuilding and protection of stocks of concern and their ecosystems/habitats.

## **7. Southern Resident Killer Whales**

The Government of Canada, together with Indigenous groups, partners and stakeholders, continues to take important steps to protect and recover the Southern Resident Killer Whales (listed as Endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* [SARA]) in keeping with direction provided in SARA recovery documents. In May 2018, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) determined that the Southern Resident Killer Whale is facing [imminent threats](#) to its survival and recovery. Given the status of the population and ongoing threats to Southern Resident Killer Whale recovery, Canada implemented a number of enhanced measures starting in 2018, aimed at increasing prey availability and accessibility for Southern Resident Killer Whales - particularly with respect to Chinook salmon - and reducing threats related to physical and acoustic disturbance in key foraging areas.

For the 2020 season, Canada focused on ways to support increased Chinook salmon prey availability and reduced physical and acoustic disturbance in key foraging areas within the Southern Resident Killer Whale critical habitat. The fishing-related management measures for the 2020 season included area-based closures for recreational and commercial salmon fishing in the southern Gulf Islands, Juan de Fuca Strait and Swiftsure Bank; Interim Sanctuary Zones (established via Interim Order under the *Canada Shipping Act*) that prohibit boating and fishing (with some exceptions) in a portion of Swiftsure Bank and off the south-west coast of Pender Island and south-east coast of Saturna Island; and a voluntary fishing avoidance zone which encourage fishers to stop fishing within 1000m of any killer whales within Canadian Pacific waters. The mandatory closures did not apply to individuals or vessels being used to fish for food,

social or ceremonial purposes, or for domestic purposes pursuant to a treaty under a license issued under the Aboriginal Communal Fishing License Regulations.

For 2021, the Government of Canada will be reviewing the suite of [2020 management measures](#) and discussing potential adjustments to measures with Indigenous groups, the Southern Resident Killer Whale Indigenous and Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group, Technical Working Groups, and with key stakeholders. Canada intends to ensure that any updates to actions for the 2021 season can be implemented by spring 2021 to coincide with the return of Southern Resident Killer Whales in typically greater numbers to the Salish Sea.

## **8. Interior Fraser River Steelhead/Chum Management**

### *Species At Risk Act Update*

In January 2018, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessed the Thompson and Chilcotin River Steelhead Designatable Units (DU's) as Endangered, triggering a Species at Risk Act (SARA) Emergency Listing Process. This Listing Process concluded on July 11, 2019, when the Minister of Fisheries announced Cabinet's decision not to list Thompson or Chilcotin River Steelhead under the Species at Risk Act, opting to support recovery of these stocks through existing regulatory mechanisms under Fisheries Act. This past November, COSEWIC reassessed both the Thompson and Chilcotin River Steelhead DU's as Endangered. When this assessment is formally published in the COSEWIC Annual Report (expected in October 2021), a second Listing Process will be triggered under the Species at Risk Act. Key threats to Thompson and Chilcotin River Steelhead include changes to the marine environment, fishing mortality, degradation of freshwater and marine habitats, predation and competition.

### *Fisheries Management Measures to Support Interior Fraser River Steelhead Recovery*

Addressing declines in spawner abundance of Interior Fraser River (IFR) Steelhead (the management group that includes Thompson and Chilcotin River Steelhead) requires a precautionary approach to reduce incidental fishery mortalities and allow as many of these fish as possible to reach spawning areas. For many years, a window closure approach has been used within the Fraser River to reduce bycatch of Steelhead during commercial fisheries targeting salmon. The window closure approach was expanded significantly starting in 2018 to all fishing sectors, and to all areas within the migration corridor of Interior Fraser River Steelhead in marine waters and into the Fraser River and tributaries.

Expectations for IFR Steelhead in 2021 are for continued extremely poor returns, requiring ongoing measures to reduce impacts in salmon fisheries to maximize the number of potential IFR Steelhead spawners. As we await additional analyses that will be developed as part of the next SARA Listing Process, the Department is committed to maintaining minimal impacts on IFR Steelhead. At this time, we anticipate that measures applied to the Chum fishery in 2021 to protect IFR steelhead will closely follow those implemented in 2019 and 2020, and significant changes to existing IFR Steelhead measures are not expected. Consultations will occur on all fisheries management measures taken to protect IFR Steelhead in the coming year as part of the Department's preseason planning and associated management measures for management of chum salmon.



In addition to the measures taken to reduce incidental fisheries mortalities of IFR Steelhead in salmon fisheries, DFO continues to work with the Province of BC to address other threats to IFR Steelhead. As part of this process, DFO will be working to ensure that all our programs, including hatchery and habitat management, are aligned to support IFR Steelhead recovery.

## **9. Fraser River Sockeye and Pink**

A quantitative forecast for both Fraser Sockeye and Pink returns is expected in early 2021. Fraser Sockeye returns have been well below the median forecast in recent years while pink returns have fluctuated but have been below the median with the exception of the 2019 return. 2019 and 2020 were the lowest returns of Fraser Sockeye since official record keeping began. As a result, planning will need to consider the potential for a range of returns, as well as specific management measures for protecting and rebuilding weak stocks.

Key Fraser Sockeye considerations during consultations will include the duration of the window closure to protect weak stocks returning at the start of the season, the escapement plan for Early Stuart, Early Summer, Summer and Late run aggregates and additional management measures for stocks of concern. The Department plans to identify 2 escapement plan options in the draft IFMP for consideration in 2021. Options are usually informed by the Sockeye escapement plan implemented in the brood year (2017) and modifications to account for annual considerations including forecast returns. Further discussion will be required on the potential for additional terminal harvest opportunities for Fraser Sockeye stocks that may return in abundance. For Fraser Pink salmon an escapement plan consistent with recent years will be consulted upon. Key considerations will take into account the uncertainty of in-season information but also bycatch concerns of co-migrating stocks and species. In addition discussions regarding the Fraser test fishery program will be included in pre-season planning discussions.

## **10. Southern BC Coho**

As outlined in Chapter 5 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST), allowable exploitation rates (ERs) for Canada and the U.S. are identified based on the status of Coho management units (MUs). Canada is responsible for determining the status level for Canadian MUs and setting the corresponding ER caps for both parties. Canada's management approach is driven by the status of Interior Fraser River (IFR) Coho MU, based on an integration of marine survival rates (with break points at 3% and 6%) and spawner abundance. Under this approach, ER caps are set at 20%, 30% and 45% for *Low*, *Moderate* and *Abundant* status, respectively. Canada is required to confirm the status of Interior Fraser River coho MU in March of each year.

Southern BC coho have been in a low productivity regime for many years. Based on marine survival rates and spawner abundance observed in the last two years, we anticipate that Interior Fraser River Coho will remain in *Low* status in 2021. Under *Low* status, Canada has managed domestic fisheries with a precautionary approach to achieve an exploitation rate cap of 3%-5%. Domestic management measures are anticipated to be similar to recent years and will be discussed through the annual process to develop the Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs).

Status determination and corresponding ER caps are not contemplated for the Strait of Georgia and Lower Fraser MUs at this time, due to insufficient data. However, new stock assessment projects are being developed to provide additional information for these MUs, which can be used to determine status in the

future. In 2020, a pilot program was initiated to establish the feasibility of implementing a mark-recapture program to estimate Lower Fraser Coho escapement. This assessment program is funded to continue in 2021. Additionally, the Department will be evaluating whether a similar approach can be used to estimate escapement for a portion of the Strait of Georgia MU, which would include collection of hatchery and wild Coho samples in September. Consultations on these programs, including the impacts of these assessments on stocks of concern, will occur as part of the preseason planning process.

## Northern BC

### **11. Northern BC Coho**

After experiencing near-record low returns of Coho on the North Coast in 2018, the Department implemented additional measures to reduce the overall exploitation rate of commercial fisheries in 2019. Additional reductions were implemented in 2020, with a goal of a 50% overall reduction in commercial exploitation in Northern Fisheries. While both commercial and recreational catch was reduced in 2020, and some Coho stocks showed modest improvement, preliminary escapement data suggest that many Northern Coho populations remain broadly weak. Ocean survival continues to be a concern for Coho returning in 2021; and subsequently, a continued precautionary approach to Coho fishery management is warranted for the coming year. The Department plans to consult with First Nations and stakeholders through the IFMP development process to discuss specific Northern Coho management actions.

### **12. Skeena Chinook**

In 2020, in response to a continued trend in poor productivity of Skeena Chinook, the Department implemented a suite of management measures to reduce the overall exploitation rates on Skeena Chinook. For 2020, restrictions also included an extended closure of the commercial troll fishery in Northern BC until August 15 to pass through Fraser Summer 4<sub>1</sub> Chinook to support Fraser First Nations FSC harvests. 2020 was also a unique year due to COVID-19 and restrictions on travel which reduced recreational fishing effort in the North Coast and Haida Gwaii. Considering the reduction in both commercial and recreational exploitation, Chinook escapements to the Skeena River still fell short of expectations. For 2021, preliminary Chinook data suggests that we remain in a period of low Chinook productivity, and continued precautionary management measures will be required. The Department intends to engage First Nations and stakeholders both bilaterally and as part of the 2021 IFMP planning process to develop fishing plans that will be informed by the management actions implemented in recent seasons.