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Justice Cohen – DFO prohibit salmon farming unless certain by 2020

Sointula, British Columbia, October, 31, 2012 – Today Justice Bruce Cohen released the Final Report on his \$26 million inquiry into the 17-year decline of the Fraser sockeye. Cohen states DFO should be relieved of its duty to promote salmon farming, citing risk of favouring the interests of the salmon farming industry and divided loyalties that might “prejudice the health of wild salmon stocks.”

Dr. Alexandra Morton, both a participant (Aquaculture Coalition) and a witness in the Cohen Commission, states she is relieved Cohen concurred salmon farming is a risk to the Fraser sockeye. “Cohen’s statements were astonishingly strong, he is clearly concerned salmon farms are impacting the Fraser sockeye. He recommends a freeze on farm salmon production on the Fraser sockeye migration route, a revision of fish farm siting criteria to protect salmon migration routes and that if by 2020 DFO cannot be certain farm salmon are not a threat to wild salmon, salmon farms should be prohibited from the Fraser sockeye migration routes.”

The Commission made hundreds of BC provincial farm salmon disease records public. Morton went through those records with a fine tooth comb finding reference to lesions characteristic of three European viruses. Testimony by Dr. Kyle Garver, DFO stated that during a viral outbreak a single salmon farm can release 650 billion infectious viral particles per hour. Cohen recommended mitigation of salmon farm impact should not be delayed in the absence of certainty.

“Justice Cohen’s report came out in the nick-of-time because the province of BC is poised to renew salmon farm licenses of occupations throughout BC,” said Morton. “BC can no longer responsibly act as landlord to this industry without consulting with the Fraser River First Nations and looking into the virus research underway. The Fraser sockeye have been declining for the past 17 years; exactly the duration salmon feedlots have occupied the Fraser sockeye migration route. We have a situation here and the Province of BC is going to have to figure out whether they are going to come out for or against wild salmon.”

Morton and a team of academics, First Nations, fishermen and others are currently tracking three European viruses in BC wild and farmed salmon. Their results will be made public when complete.

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