



Media Release
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One year after \$26 million sockeye inquiry ended and still no government action—Experts fear government is retreating instead

Vancouver—A media conference today marked a full year since Justice Bruce Cohen released the Final Report of the \$26M “Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River.” Despite the impressive strength of Cohen’s findings and the solid 75 recommendations tabled to protect Fraser River sockeye, government has taken no meaningful action on the Report or towards rebuilding salmon numbers. In fact, as representatives from science and First Nations expressed today, government has instead weakened protection of salmon and habitat.

Although federal government officials say they’re taking positive steps “consistent with the recommendations,” many deadlines laid out in the Final Report have lapsed with no action or response from government. A few examples suggesting that government is acting counter to the recommendations include:

- Degrading habitat protections in the Fisheries Act
- Cutting significant numbers of biologists and other Fisheries and Oceans Canada staff
- Still refraining from public reporting of disease and virus data from open-net salmon farms

Dr. Craig Orr—an ecologist and expert witness during the Inquiry—spoke at a media conference today outlining what needs to be done to protect wild salmon into the future. “A year has passed and the public and wild salmon deserve a response,” said Dr. Orr, Executive Director of Watershed Watch. “Recommendations have been ignored around the Wild Salmon Policy—a progressive government initiative that promises to safeguard wild salmon. The public is left wondering just where wild salmon are in government priorities.”

Stan Proboszcz—a fisheries biologist and participant with standing in the Inquiry—has tracked the lack of action on the Inquiry over the last year. “Government has ignored specific inquiry recommendations and missed about [14 deadlines](#),” said Mr. Proboszcz. “Although officials say they’re acting “consistently” with the recommendations, it’s unclear what they’re doing and how it’s connected to the judicial synthesis of countless experts from the Inquiry.”

Justice Cohen’s Final Report highlights viruses and diseases in open-net salmon farms as a risk to wild salmon. One of his recommendations states Fisheries and Oceans Canada should give non-government scientists timely access to disease outbreak data from salmon farms. “New evidence on viruses has come to light since the Inquiry ended and we need to tackle this issue seriously to protect wild fish,” said Dr. Orr. “We need to have timely access to primary virus and disease data from open-net salmon farms.”

The Inquiry was spurred by concerns from many groups about low salmon returns to the Fraser River in 2009, drawing wide participation from First Nations, scientists, recreational fishers, conservationists and many others looking for answers and solutions. Justice Cohen mindfully examined volumes of evidence and designed thorough and thoughtful recommendations to protect salmon for the future. “It’s still apparent to everyone the Cohen Inquiry matters, and those that care about wild salmon care about measured implementation of its recommendations,” said Mr. Proboszcz. “Watershed Watch launched a petition to allow the public to voice their opinions on implementing the recommendations in order to protect salmon for the future.”

The petition can be found here: <http://www.watershed-watch.org/cohen-petition/>

To arrange an interview please contact:

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The delay in moving forward with implementing the recommendations spurred Watershed Watch Salmon Society to track government’s response to the Inquiry—see their [Cohen Report Card](#) for more background information.

Watershed Watch Salmon Society (WWSS) has been watching out for B.C.’s wild salmon since 1998. Our focus is to elevate the dialogue surrounding wild salmon and to improve our chances of saving them. Watershed Watch believes that real changes in attitude and behaviour are based on understanding, and that significant understanding requires a broad and deep appreciation of a wide range of habitat, harvest, and management issues. www.watershed-watch.org

The SOS Marine Conservation Foundation (SOS) is a group of successful business leaders, entrepreneurs and philanthropists brought together to protect B.C.’s wild salmon stocks and the marine environment from negative impacts of open net-cage salmon farms and establish B.C. as a leader in creating a globally renowned, stable and viable aquaculture industry. www.saveoursalmon.ca