



Media Release
February 24, 2014

Conservation groups call on Auditor General due to lack of action on \$26 million salmon inquiry recommendations funded by taxpayers

Vancouver—Watershed Watch Salmon Society and SOS Marine Conservation Foundation today filed Environmental Petitions with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. While the federal government is to be commended for initiating the [Cohen Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Fraser River Sockeye](#), the call to the Auditor General was prompted by a dire concern around government's failure to meet deadlines and take action associated with this Inquiry's recommendations.

Nearly 16 months have passed since Justice Cohen's Final Report and recommendations—hailed as a “blueprint for salmon conservation”—were publicly tabled. Despite government claims of action “consistent with Justice Cohen's recommendations,” it's inescapable that, to date, [18 recommendation deadlines have lapsed](#) without any clear action or response from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) or the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Another significant recommendation deadline looms in just over a month. By March 31st, 2014, an independent body, such as the Office of the Auditor General, is to report to Canadians on the federal government's progress in implementing the Wild Salmon Policy—a progressive federal initiative geared towards protecting British Columbia's wild salmon which has seemingly fallen to the back of the line, in terms of DFO priorities.

The two Environmental Petitions filed today include specific questions posed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and other federal agencies on various aspects of the Cohen Inquiry such as:

- Can DFO provide evidence that it has taken action on the Inquiry's recommendation to remedy its conflicting bureaucratic mandates between conserving wild fish and promoting industries such as the open-net salmon farming industry?
- Has a specific timeline been developed for implementation of the six strategies of the Wild Salmon Policy and if so, at what date(s) does DFO plan that its strategies will finally be implemented?
- What work, if any, has DFO and any other federal departments done to review the Cohen Inquiry Final Report and implement its recommendations?

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans must reply in written form to the 36 questions filed in the two environmental petitions within 120 days of receiving them.

Dr. Craig Orr, Executive Director of Watershed Watch Salmon Society, expressed deep concern over the lack of meaningful action from the federal government on the Cohen Inquiry recommendations. Dr. Orr said, “We are left with no choice but to call on the Auditor General of Canada to investigate exactly what the federal government has done to review the Cohen Commission recommendations and report back to Canadians. British Columbia’s wild salmon are at stake here.”

Stan Proboszcz, Fisheries Biologist with Watershed Watch Salmon Society, spent several years as a participant and following-up on the Cohen Commission and was pleased to see the high calibre of work outlined in the Final Report. He was hopeful it would lead to improved protection for salmon and habitat. Fast forward almost 16 months, Mr. Proboszcz now fears the federal government is side-stepping the Commission’s work with slick communications that commit only to “acting consistently with the recommendations.” Mr. Proboszcz said, “Wild salmon are a precious icon integral to the fabric of Canadian society. Disregarding these recommendations is sadly reminiscent of the East Coast cod collapse, when federal bureaucrats were accused of ignoring the recommendations of scientists—and we all know what effect that collapse had on Canadians.”

-30-

To arrange an interview please contact:

- Dr. Craig Orr, Executive Director, Watershed Watch Salmon Society (604)-809-2799
- Stan Proboszcz, Fisheries Biologist, Watershed Watch Salmon Society (604)-314-2713

Background information and resources:

The Environmental Petitions that include background information and 34 questions posed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans can be accessed here: [Environmental Petition Part 1 of 2](#); [Environmental Petition Part 2 of 2](#).

Photos by Stan Proboszcz are for free use and publication: [Cohen Inquiry photo 1](#); [Cohen Inquiry photo 2](#); [Sockeye salmon spawning photo](#).

Watershed Watch Salmon Society has also launched a citizen’s petition that allows Canadians to voice their opinions on implementing the recommendations to protect salmon for the future: <http://www.watershed-watch.org/cohen-petition/>.

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