

## **U.K. group eyes eco-approval for Fraser sockeye**

### **Certification seems more about selling than protecting failing run**

By Brian Lewis, The Province July 8, 2010



Province Fraser Valley columnist Brian Lewis  
Photograph by: File photo, The Province

Are European and Asian consumers being conned into buying B.C. salmon under the pretence that our fish are harvested in ways that preserve stock health and protect the marine ecosystems?

More to the point, are Fraser River sockeye about to be included in this "eco-label" certification scheme?

These kinds of questions keep people like Craig Orr, executive director of Watershed Watch Salmon Society, awake at night — because if the answer is "yes" to those questions, then we have a problem.

At the heart of this issue is a U.K.-based non-profit organization known as the Marine Stewardship Council, which utilizes independent third parties to investigate and subsequently certify specific fisheries throughout the world as meeting MSC criteria.

Thus, once certified, products from that fishery can carry the distinctive blue MSC label on the packaging — which, obviously, is intended to give consumers confidence that what they buy doesn't degrade the environment.

However, is this certification more about selling fish than protecting fisheries?

The MSC recently certified three B.C. sockeye-salmon fisheries — the Skeena and Nass rivers sockeye and the Barclay Sound sockeye.

Keep in mind that all three fisheries contain threatened and endangered salmon stocks that Orr says are "routinely" overharvested. "As disturbing as this is, the MSC has placed several conditions for improvement on these fisheries and we will be watching closely to see if these conditions are enforced," he adds.

But incredibly, Orr says the MSC was about to grant a similar certification to the Fraser River sockeye fishery — that is until Watershed Watch, the David Suzuki Foundation and SkeenaWild Conservation Trust collectively raised a red flag.

<http://www.theprovince.com/business/group+eyes+approval+Fraser+sockeye/3249111/story.html>

They filed a notice of objection to the MSC's intention to award ecocertification to the Fraser sockeye — which anyone on this corner of the planet well knows is in deep, deep trouble — then spent two days recently giving evidence during a Vancouver adjudication.

The MSC flew its lawyer in from Halifax to hear the concerns, and subsequently placed its pending Fraser sockeye certification temporarily on hold — until this coming Saturday.

Nor are the three B.C. groups holding their collective breath that the MSC will reject this certification because, as Orr points out, the MSC has never denied a fishery certification after completion of the assessment process. Nor has any objection to a certification ever been upheld, he adds.

For the MSC to even consider certifying Fraser sockeye is ludicrous, given the critical depletion of some of its stocks that are listed as "endangered" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and as "critically endangered" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Does the MSC not realize that we're also now in the early stages of the federal government's Cohen Commission into the disappearance of millions of Fraser sockeye over the past few years, the first such review that has real teeth because of its judicial powers of subpoena?

Finally, as Watershed Watch ecologist Aaron Hill says: "Eco-certification can provide a powerful incentive for improvement in the way we manage our fisheries, but it becomes meaningless when you set the bar too low and certify unsustainable and mismanaged fisheries."

Something, indeed, smells fishy here.

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