



## Conservation groups offer conditional support for MSC certification of B.C. pink salmon fisheries

Industry and government must improve monitoring and protection

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JULY 28, 2011**

VANCOUVER – Four B.C. conservation groups want assurance that 44 conditions will be met before offering full support for the Marine Stewardship Council's certification of three B.C. pink salmon fisheries. Watershed Watch, Skeena Wild, Raincoast Conservation Foundation and the David Suzuki Foundation support the conditional certification but say their support depends on the improvements, or conditions, being implemented within the time frames required by the certification.

The International Marine Stewardship Council is announcing its certification of the B.C. pink salmon fisheries this week. The announcement comes after lengthy efforts by conservation groups, industry and government to agree on improvements that will lead to sustainable fishing of pink salmon. These improvements are designed to bring the fishery into compliance with MSC's criteria within five years.

"Getting to this stage has required extensive investment of time and money by industry, government and our organizations," said Aaron Hill of Watershed Watch. "The willingness industry has shown to address problems within the fishery has been an important factor in our support."

Improvements necessary for the pink fishery lie in three general areas.

"First, oversight of fishing practices, catch and by-catch by independent third parties has been insufficient, said Greg Knox of Skeena Wild. "This allows substantial numbers of other species, including endangered populations of chum, sockeye and steelhead salmon, to be discarded by fishers targeting pink salmon. Second, Fisheries and Oceans Canada's failure to implement its Wild Salmon Policy means that sustainable fishing levels for pink salmon, as well as the species discarded, have not been defined. Finally, the impacts of fisheries on marine and terrestrial wildlife and habitat have not been fully considered."

A clear example of outstanding problems was revealed in a fishery that was opened along the North Coast of B.C. last week. In one 16-hour opening, more than 21,000 chum salmon were discarded in a fishery targeting pink salmon. Many North Coast chum stocks are depressed and a lack of monitoring means we don't know how badly these fisheries may be harming at-risk salmon.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and industry have acknowledged these required improvements and have endorsed an action plan to address them. Under the plan, conservation groups will participate in annual audits of the certification. Failure to make progress may lead to the fishery losing its MSC certification. Success depends on DFO making this a priority by committing the necessary funds and people. DFO officials have stated, however, that they cannot commit additional resources. This has led to concern among industry, conservation groups and those in DFO responsible for the action plan that DFO budget cuts may put the certification at risk.

“This is the start of the process, not the end,” said Jeffery Young of the David Suzuki Foundation. “This certification highlights a number of problems with this fishery that must be addressed. It’s now up to the federal government to provide the resources necessary to improve this fishery and maintain certification.”

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