

# Will Investigate Fraser River Salmon Conditions

**A committee of ten scientific experts look into salmon situation on Fraser River. — Letter of W. D. Burdis to Bureau of Industrial Research.**

A committee of ten, five to be appointed by the British Columbia University, five to be named by the British Columbia branch of the Bureau of Industrial Research, will undertake the investigation of the salmon situation on the Fraser River, comprehending in the scope of their inquiry the possibility of international agreement as to closing the river for four years.

This is the result of correspondence between the British Columbia Salmon Cannery Association and the National Scientific Research commission at Ottawa.

The case for British Columbia canners is stated in the following letter, addressed by W.D. Burdis, secretary of the British Columbia Salmon Cannery Association, to Dr. A. B. McCallum, chairman of the Bureau of Industrial Research at Ottawa:

"An intimation of your wish to receive a statement regarding the unsatisfactory condition of the Fraser salmon industry, and reasons why the Royal Fisheries Commission should fully investigate them, having been received in your telegram of September 24th ult. to Messrs. H. Bell-Irving & Co., and shown to the members of this association, I have been instructed to submit the following brief statement of facts bearing upon the subject, for your esteemed consideration:

"The present deplorable condition of the Fraser River salmon industry has arisen primarily by the fact that the fish in their migrations to the head waters of the Fraser River, (to spawn) from the Pacific ocean, have to traverse waters belonging to the United States and Canada respectively, before reaching their objective.

"Their progress is arrested by regulations affecting their capture, which vary in character, scope and enforcement in the respective waters.

"On their entrance to the Straits of Fuca, about 100 miles from Puget Sound, they were met this year by a fleet of 416 purse seines (500 fathoms each), and 147 drag seines (300 fathoms each), and fished continuously, up to the months of the 280 traps installed in the waters of Puget Sound in addition to which 478 gill nets (300 fathoms each) were fished in various areas in American waters.

"These appliances took a fresh heavy toll of salmon, equal in fact to about three times the number taken by Canadian fisherman in the home waters of the fish.

"In contrast with this policy, on the Canadian side from Cape Flattery, upwards, only 9 traps and 14 purse seines were licensed this year.

"On reaching the Fraser River estuary and in the adjacent waters of the Gulf of Georgia the remainder of the fish had to run the gauntlet of 2,600 gill nets (150 fathoms each) this year, fished from Sunday evening at 6 p. m. to midnight on the Friday following.

"Then again, gill net fishing is permitted to Mission bridge about 50 miles above the mouth of the river, which has entirely nullified the benefits of the weekly close season, as the up river boats go out on the Sunday night and Monday and catch the fish which had reached there during the previous week end.

"The closing of the Fraser fishing above Westminster bridge has been sought by the canners, but has not been conceded by the government.

"The marvel is that any salmon at all are able to reach the spawning grounds — and the serious condition of the industry has long been recognized by the thoughtful canners and fishermen.

"Twenty years ago a dam was built across the entrance to Quesnelle Lake, the most important spawning area on the

Fraser, which for 5 or 6 years completely blocked the salmon from entering, and was the means of depleting the subsequent supply. A fishway was afterwards put in, but the mischief was done and that area has never been restored to its former value.

"In 1912-13 the Canadian Northern Railway constructors were allowed to dump the debris from their right of way all down the canyon of the Fraser and in doing so narrowed the channels and filled in numberless spaces in back eddies wherein the salmon had rested on their way up stream. The condition was aggravated by the collapse into the river of portions of the mountain at Hell's Gate, in 1913-14 which completely blocked the channel, the result being that hundreds of thousands of spawning sockeyes failed to get through and died of exhaustion below Hell Gate—the dead fish being piled upon the banks for miles, and others being carried down towards the sea.

Though strenuous efforts were made by the Dominion Fisheries officials to mitigate the obstructions in time to permit some of the fish to pass up, only a comparatively small number got by. Careful inspection by Fraser River officials made it certain that in 1917 no large run could be expected, and that this has proved correct the result of this year will show.

"In 1909 there was collected 98,000,000 Sockeye eggs at the Fraser River hatcheries, which was just the same quantity as in 1905, but in 1913 only 86,000,000 were received, of which 25,000,000 were collected below Hell's Gate and Seuzle Rapids, after the slides before referred to, occurred; and were incubated in the Harrison Lake hatchery.

"This year the Provincial Fisheries Department reports that the Fraser River spawning beds will be no better seeded than in average off years, which have also shown a serious depreciation since 1910.

"The packs of Fraser River Sockeyes from 1901 have shown steady decreases, except in 1913, the year of the Hell's Gate disaster, which was 142,000 cases more than in 1909 — and gave rise to a hope that conditions were improving — for as will be seen by the following statement the decrease has been steadily increasing:

Year	Fraser River Packers of—	
	Sockeyes	Other Grades
1901	920,313 cases	69,939 cases
1902	293,477 "	33,618 "
1903	204,809 "	32,313 "
1904	72,688 "	56,215 "
1905	837,489 "	39,647 "
1906	183,007 "	57,479 "
1907	59,815 "	103,301 "
1908	63,126 "	26,058 "
1909	542,248 "	24,955 "
1910	133,045 "	90,103 "
1911	58,487 "	242,857 "
1912	108,784 "	65,137 "
1913	684,596 "	47,463 "
1914	185,483 "	142,907 "
1915	89,040 "	200,159 "
1916	27,394 "	79,046 "
1917 estimated	170,000 "	Still packing

of which 18,700 cases were filled from Sockeyes caught in traps in the Straits of Fuca.

"Since 1914 the gravity of the situation has become truly alarming. With a pack on the Fraser of only 89,040 cases of Sockeyes in 1915 — a drop to 27,394 cases occurred in 1916. Whilst the estimated Sockeye pack of 170,000 cases this (1917) season represents only 25 per cent of the Sockeye pack of 1913.

"This relative 25 per cent of the salmon in transit this year, as compared with 1913 was only obtained by the intensive efforts of the fishermen, anxious to make the most of the high prices being paid for Sockeyes, (35c to 75c per fish), and of the canners to get up a pack.

"It is reasonable therefore to estimate, that as only 25 per cent. of the salmon which passed up in 1913 spawn-