

# Conservation of Fish Supply in Northern Waters

Recommendations of Mr. John P. Babcock, Assistant Commissioner of Fisheries for British Columbia, Before the Dominion Royal Commission on Fisheries in District No. 2.

The Dominion Royal Commission investigating fishing conditions in District No. 2 of British Columbia, which embraces all the northern sections of the Province, heard in Victoria the valuable testimony of Mr. John P. Babcock, Assistant Commissioner of Fisheries for British Columbia. Mr. Babcock narrated in his evidence present conditions and remedies to be applied in conservation of the supply. Mr. Babcock made the following recommendations in the interests of his client "The Fish":

The Skeena River pack of sockeye in the last ten years has averaged 119,327 cases. In seven of these years the pack has not equalled the average. In the last five years the average for ten years has only been reached once.

The Rivers Inlet pack of sockeye in the last ten years has averaged 101,967 cases. The average has not been reached in eight of those years and has only been reached twice in the last five years.

The sockeye pack of the Naas River in the last ten years has averaged 32,544 cases. In only three years was the average reached in the last ten years. The pack in two of the last five years only has equalled the average.

The record of the yearly pack displays forceably that the fishing done there in the last five years has been most effective. Deductions based on the total pack are misleading and valueless, since only in the last three years has a market for pinks and chums been developed.

Deductions as to the extent of the run in given years to be of value must be based on the reports from the spawning area and not from the record of the catch. Those based upon the reports from the spawning area are far the most illuminating and dependable; hence the importance of placing that work in the hands of capable, observant and energetic men.

Notwithstanding the satisfactory records of the pack and the nature of the reports from the spawning areas of the Skeena and Naas Rivers and Rivers and Smith Inlet,—with the exception of the records of 1916,—I am of the opinion that even under existing conditions as to cannery and boat limitations, a greater proportion of the run is being captured now than in former years. This is evidence by the increased energy prompted by the increased price, and (2) by the extension seaward of fishing efforts.

To offset this in the waters mentioned, I suggest (1) the extension of the closed season to July 1st, (2) the cutting off of at least five miles from the upper fishing limits on the Naas and Rivers Inlet, making the Oxtal the limit on the Skeena, and (3) the addition of twelve hours to the present weekly closed season, and (4) provide, that the weekly closed time shall begin with the flooding of the tide, nearest to 6 p.m. of Friday in each week, instead of automatically setting the time at 6 p.m. Notice can be given at opening of season of the closed hours. Since the fish move on the change from ebb to flood, it commonly occurs that the present weekly closed time begins with the ebbing of the tide and that for from eight to twelve hours no fish seek to enter the Naas or Skeena, with the result that during some weeks of the season the fish are afforded but 24 hours of freedom from capture. It is very doubtful if the advancing fish can cover the present fishing limits of the Skeena or the Naas in 36 hours.

These suggestions are made upon the supposition that the present boat limitations are to be operative. If additional licenses for canneries and fishing are to be granted, additional protection must be afforded the fish.

The extension of the net fishing closed season to July 1st and (2) the prohibition of the use of other than sockeye

nets until the run of sockeye has passed and the run of coho begins. While the sockeye nets will take the medium sized and even some of the larger spring salmon, the larger and more prolific spawners may escape capture in the river. The run of spring salmon to these waters has never been of large proportions. The elimination of spring salmon nets will develop trolling. The season for trolling outside the rivers should be open the year around.

Protective measures in other waters of District No. 2 should be as follows:

Smith Inlet.—Eliminate the fishing in Quala Creek and within 200 yards of its mouth, or reduce the licenses to that of 1914.

Other Waters.—Prohibit the dragging of seines within 200 yards of the mouth of any stream. Give the Inspector power to define the fishing area for specific waters, and to close the season in any waters when in his judgment it is necessary for the protection of the fish.

When, as in 1916, it is demonstrated that the beds of the Skeena, Rivers and Smiths Inlet or other watersheds were inadequately seeded, the Department should take steps to afford the fish hatched in those years a greater measure of protection upon their return, four or five years hence, than was afforded their parents, because the Skeena and Rivers Inlet mature in the fourth and some in the fifth year. A greater measure of protection, therefore, should be given to the runs of 1920 and 1921 than was afforded the run of 1916.

This should be done for every year's run when the spawning beds are shown not to have been abundantly seeded. Regulations to be effective must be made to fit the known requirements of each particular year's run. Blanket regulations for a series of years, that treat all years alike, are no longer adequate for waters that show evidence of depletion.

The need and efficiency of just such measures as are here suggested are made manifest from the facts in the life history of the sockeye which the Province has scientifically ascertained. It is a forceable illustration of the necessity for knowledge as to the life history of the species which it is desirable to conserve. Without the work of Dr. Gilbert and Mr. Thompson, we could not intelligently legislate to conserve the supply of either salmon or halibut. We can now act on known—scientifically ascertained—facts, and with some promise of accomplishing results.

If it be provided that canners or fishing concerns engaged in canning or freezing salmon shall not furnish motor boats to fishermen engaged in fishing for salmon, I personally can see no objection to their use by independent white fishermen.

Motor boats used by Japanese would, I am convinced, have a catching capacity in excess of the boats now used. The Japanese, as you have been informed, are persistent fishermen. If they had motor boats they would keep their nets in the water longer than at present is possible.

A Japanese using a motor boat and having his net in the water would not hesitate to take it up and replace it in other nearby waters where he saw evidence of moving fish. This is frequently done by Japanese on the Fraser.

In considering the motor boat question, I submit that consideration should be given to the use that Japanese would make of them. The Japanese fishermen of the Fraser River own their own boats, and many own their own nets. The off years on the Fraser are no longer profitable. In consequence, if they were permitted to use motor boats in District No. 2, canners who desired to use them, in connection with their plants, would have no difficulty in getting them to take them into District No. 2. Once this is done, other canners must follow.