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Department of Indian Affairs
Canada

BABINE AGENCY

Office of Indian Agent

F-5-385.

Your file, 18/27246.

Hazelton, B.C.
December 9th, 1932.

Sir:-

re - Questionnaire on Supplying of Fish for Food.

In reply to your letter of December 2nd may I be permitted to say that the supplying of fish from Coastal points to the Indians of this Agency would, no doubt, be a great saving on sockeye and other salmon proceeding to the spawning grounds. However, there are many points to be considered before entire satisfaction could be obtained, namely:-

1. Indians of this Agency have been obtaining part of their natural food supplies for hundreds of years from the Skeena, Bulkley, Kispiox, Babine Rivers, etc. The fish food comprises spring, sockeye, coho and humpback salmon. Apparently after the fish is freshwater run it has an entirely different flavour from the saltwater production. Furthermore, the Indians have a way of curing and salting the fish entirely different from the samples of the dried fish sent here.
2. On each of the aforementioned rivers numerous smokehouses have been built at considerable expense; also many plots of ground have been cultivated in the vicinity of same, in fact a large percentage of the Babine Indians have built small houses adjoining their smokehouses. Smokehouses are quite a distance from the villages and are close to the supply of fish.
3. As noted in answer No. 12 of the Questionnaire I have been endeavouring for the last three years in getting the Indians throughout the different reserves of the Agency to salt considerable quantities of salmon for winter use. Salmon properly salted in barrels retains all the natural nourishment and, from general observations, is more beneficial to the health of the Indians. Could Coast-caught salmon be salted and shipped in barrels to the Interior Indians?
4. As you are aware the Hagwilget Indians of the Taitak, Morissetown and Babine Lake Reserves live almost entirely by fishing and hunting, the fishing season taking up about three months of the year at which all members of the different Bands participate. I feel, by cutting out this yearly occurrence and supplying fish food from the Coast, that it would leave the Indians with a lot of idle time on their hands which, eventually, might lead to discontent amongst the Bands. However, this condition would not apply to the Skeena River Indians who migrate yearly to the Coast Canneries for three months where they obtain work.

In conclusion, I am of opinion that, although the principle in general would be a good move on the part of the Department to supply fish for food to the Indians from the Coast so as to curtail the netting and spearing of salmon proceeding to the spawning grounds, the time is not opportune for such a movement. For the last two years there has been absolutely no work for the Indians in this Northern Country and, although we have been struggling along with the bare necessities of life at a comparatively small cost to the Department, I feel that this matter could be left in abeyance and every assistance given to the Indian to obtain his own natural food until times improve when work is obtainable and the employment of Indians is general.

Your obedient servant,

"G.C. Martimer"

C. C. Perry, Esq.,
Assistant Indian Commissioner for B.C.,
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Indian Agent.

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