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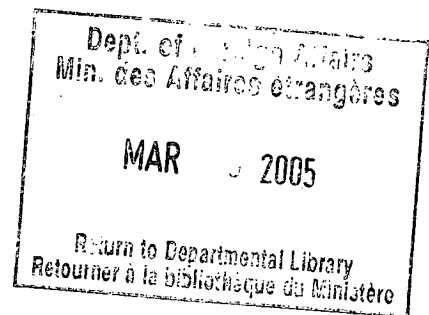
U.S. perception of the West Coast  
salmon fishery : qualitative report  
16771881

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**U.S. PERCEPTION OF THE WEST  
COAST SALMON FISHERY**



- Qualitative Report -



16771881

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>PAGE 1</b>
Background .....	Page 1
Research Objectives .....	Page 1
Methodology And Target Group .....	Page 1
<b>AWARENESS OF THE SALMON ISSUE</b> .....	<b>PAGE 2</b>
Important Issues Facing The U.S. And Washington State .....	Page 2
Perception Of The Salmon Issue .....	Page 3
What Can Be Done To Stop The Decline In Stocks? .....	Page 4
Awareness Of The Pacific Salmon Treaty .....	Page 5
<b>REACTION TO CANADIAN MESSAGES</b> .....	<b>PAGE 6</b>
<b>REACTION TO THE ADVERTISEMENTS</b> .....	<b>PAGE 7</b>
Ad 1: "We Can Preserve Our Common Salmon Fisheries. Here's The Catch." .....	Page 8
Ad 2: " In The Fight To Preserve Our Common Salmon Fisheries, The U.S. Could Tip The Scales." .....	Page 9
<b>CONCLUSIONS FOR FUTURE MESSAGES AND ADVERTISING</b> .....	<b>PAGE 9</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

On behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Free Trade, the Angus Reid Group was commissioned to examine and assess current attitudes of Puget Sound residents in the U.S. concerning the West Coast Salmon Fishery: in particular, reactions to various Canadian messages on the salmon issue and the effectiveness and impact of newspaper ads developed to advocate Canada's position. Two focus groups were held in Seattle to evaluate these issues.

### **Research Objectives**

The purposes of this study were to:

- assess the knowledge and awareness of the salmon issue;
- assess the effectiveness for being in favour or opposed to Canada's position on the salmon issue;
- assess the reaction to Canadian messages on the salmon issue;
- assess the reaction to two newspaper ads developed to advocate Canada's position.

### **Methodology and Target Group**

Two focus groups, each lasting approximately two hours, were conducted in Seattle on May 8th, 1996. Twelve participants were recruited for each group. The first group was representative of Seattle's general population aged 18 and over, while the second was comprised of people aged 18 and over who have at least college education. The participants were selected via random digit dialed telephone interviews and were offered an honorarium of US\$40.00.

## ● **WARENESS OF THE SALMON ISSUE**

### **Important Issues Facing the U.S. and Washington State**

To determine the relative importance of the salmon issue, participants were asked to identify the most significant issues facing the U.S as a whole. The following concerns were predominant:

- breakdown of "family values"/social morality;
- the health care system/welfare reform;
- violence;
- economy/national debt;
- income gap between rich and poor;
- failure of the political process.

In each group, only one person mentioned the environment as a national concern.

● Participants were then asked what they thought were the most important issues facing Washington State in particular. The issues that emerged were:

- environment/ecology:
  - clear-cutting of forests;
  - dams/Ballard locks;
  - pollution;
  - the ecological state of Puget sound;
  - the decline of the fisheries.
- high taxes;
- failure of the education system;
- homelessness;
- breakdown of family values.

As an issue, the environment and, in particular, the salmon/fishery issue would thus seem best presented as a regional, rather than a national issue.

### **Perception of the Salmon Issue**

Most participants, especially the college-educated group, were aware that salmon stocks are declining and that it is a serious problem. One participant noted that,

"I don't go salmon fishing any more - it's just a waste of time".

There was a consensus that the problem needs to be addressed immediately. There was relatively high awareness that the economies of Washington, B.C., and Alaska are somewhat dependent on the fishery and that as the fish stocks decline, the livelihood of many people is at stake. The aesthetic and recreational value of salmon was also voiced.

Participants were also clearly worried about the questionable ethics of depleting a natural resource at the expense of future generations. The term "greed" arose to express the concept that those who fish the resource give no consideration to anything (the future, the environment, or a sense of responsibility to the ecology) other than their own financial well-being or personal gratification.

When the groups were asked what they believed were responsible for the decline in salmon stocks, the most often mentioned causes were:

- fishing by Indians (although one participant raised the fact that the Indians have successfully managed many resources for centuries);
- overfishing by Russian and Japanese trawlers in international waters;
- pollution of Puget Sound;
- loss of spawning grounds due to erosion (due to clear-cutting), due to pollution, and due to development;
- excessive number of fishing boats.

Interestingly, not one participant identified Canada or Alaska as the culprit. Indeed, there was a general ignorance concerning the international nature of the situation. Some participants cited actions that Washington State has taken to deal with the problem. One interesting observation was that B.C. still has a relatively good environment, that in fact, B.C. has the resources that Washington State had 50 years ago (especially old growth forest and fisheries).

### **What can be done to Stop the Decline in Stocks?**

Participants mentioned the following measures to stop the decline in salmon stocks:

- change in societal values and general thinking;
- more cooperation between the groups concerned;
- joint efforts between Canada and the U.S.;
- including countries such as Russia and Japan in conservation efforts;
- limiting the number of fishing boats;
- re-establish spawning habitats.

One of the more extreme solutions offered was that the U.S. could push the 200 mile limit "out to 2,000 miles" if they wanted. Many participants voiced the belief that whatever was going to be done, it needed to be done swiftly. In fact,

"we need a complete and immediate moratorium"

was a not uncommon sentiment.

When asked what governments have been doing to solve the problem, participants mentioned that Alaska has cleaned up oil spills, Washington State has established fish hatcheries and has cut fish quotas, B.C. has put a toll on U.S. fishing boats passing through Canadian waters, confiscated U.S. trawlers and blockaded American fishermen.

## Awareness of the Pacific Salmon Treaty

Overall there was only general awareness of the Treaty. Knowledge that was relatively common included: the Treaty is between Canada and the U.S.; negotiations broke down in 1993; since then there has been "fighting" over renegotiation - including argument about how many salmon still exist.

When asked if they thought the Treaty was the right approach to solving the decline of the fish stocks, most participants agreed that both countries working *cooperatively* was a necessary facet. The fact that the Canadian and Washington State governments seem to be "bickering" over renegotiation roused the ire of some participants,

"It sounds like two kids fighting - wanting to play with the same toy in a sandbox".

There was some dissension among participants about who exactly should be negotiating the Treaty. Some argued that the issue transcended regional concerns and that bargaining should occur "nation to nation". Others argued that it was the politicians who had messed things up in the first place and that what is important are local, individual groups: fishermen, canners, and environmentalists for instance - those people whose lives are directly impacted by the state of the fishery. It was recognized that to implement a successful treaty required political "clout" - the closest any participant came to recognizing the inherent difficulties of managing a common property resource such as a fishery.

In general, participants were almost all in favour of more cooperation between Canada and the U.S. Some people also wanted other countries to be involved (for example Russia and Japan) in the solution. Participants wanted the U.S. to continue cooperating with Canada and to adhere to the treaty. Most participants felt that the treaty should be fair to both sides.



## REACTION TO CANADIAN MESSAGES

Several possible "sound-bites" expressing Canada's position were offered to the two groups. The reactions to each were as follows:

**"From California to British Columbia and north to Alaska, salmon is our shared interest and responsibility"**

Participants agreed with this message although some felt it was somewhat condescending. One participant wondered why California was included and then postulated that it was because there are 53 electoral votes there.

**"Canada acted last year to reduce its fish catch (Chinook by 50%). This year we will be taking even more drastic measures to further reduce the catch"**

Participants were not convinced by this message. They found the 50% figure suspect and pointed out that Chinook salmon is only one type of salmon in the fishery.

Nevertheless, if the statement were true, most participants would be impressed by Canada's actions. Although this message was not convincing, it did arouse curiosity: "is this part of the treaty?", "has the U.S. followed suit?". To be an effective message, *independent* sources of information were required (for example Washington State government sources).

**"The U.S. must match Canada's efforts. Canada cannot do it alone. We need to work together to ensure a sustainable future."**

Participants did not react positively to this message. They found the word "must" too demanding, too inflammatory. The implication is that the U.S. is not doing *anything* while Canada is. One participant said,

"Did we ever expect Canada to do it alone?"

Nevertheless, there was some agreement that Canada was, in fact, doing more to protect the fishery in the long run, and it was effective in commanding the participants' attention.

**"The livelihood of hundreds of communities on the West Coast depend on these stocks."**

Overall participants agreed with this statement although they tended to believe that the focus of the campaign should be on saving the salmon rather than on the economic well-being of the communities. It was also pointed out that the message is somewhat outdated - communities that depend on the salmon stocks have already been hurt.

**"The salmon is a resource we share. To preserve the salmon fishery we must manage it together wisely and fairly in the interests of present and future generations of Canadians and Americans."**

Although participants agreed with this message, they found it too lengthy and somewhat condescending. It was also described as being too generic: it could equally be applied to any environmental resource. Some participants also felt that the focus should be on a *global* resource rather than simply a North American one.

## **REACTION TO THE ADVERTISEMENTS**

From the two focus groups there are two clear observations. Firstly, the participants *want to know* what the state of the fishery is. They are curious about the lengths to which both Canada and the U.S. have gone to protect the salmon stocks. In particular, they feel that their own government has done little to inform the public about what policies have been implemented, to what extent their government is upholding their end of the bargain, or whether Canada or the U.S. is doing "more" to protect the resource. Secondly, they do not want to be told by the Canadian government what the U.S. should be doing. They objected to the tone of both ads, feeling that the information was, at best, patronizing and, at worst, little better than propaganda.

Together, these two observations lead to a clear conclusion. An ad campaign advocating Canada's position *could be* very effective. It must be seen to be unbiased, providing either independent sources of information or providing sources of information

on both sides of the border. A successful ad campaign must be seen more as informing the public rather than simply vague sound bites, and it must in no way sound lecturing, patronizing, or accusatory. Perhaps one could describe the key attribute of a successful campaign as "creating curiosity, not animosity".

The specific reactions to the two ads were as follows.

**Ad 1: "We can preserve our common salmon fisheries. Here's the catch."**

Participants responded well to the artwork/layout of this ad. The hook was popular in part because it is the kind of hook used in salmon fishing. The "headline" also tested well although some participants felt that the word "fisheries" should be omitted, that in fact the salmon stock itself is the asset.

The participants reacted negatively to the text of this ad however. "Canada has already made the cut" sounds as if the U.S. has done nothing which, most participants felt, is blatantly untrue. While they said this ad raised their awareness of the issue, they felt it lacked convincing factual content. "The numbers had better be true" was a common sentiment. Further, they were not impressed with the idea of having to "call Canada" to find out what their own government was doing, and without a more objective tone were unwilling to accept any information as being true. The internet address tested well.

The following suggestions were made to improve the effectiveness of the ad:

- foster a tone of cooperation rather than accusation;
- mention what Canada *has done* not what the U.S. *hasn't done*;
- supply sources of information that are either independent of both Canada and the U.S. or are local to Washington State.

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