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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE

Kitwanga

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

Issue No. 14

ROBIN AUSTIN, MLA, CHAIR

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**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE**

Kitwanga
Wednesday, June 21, 2006

Chair:

* Robin Austin (Skeena NDP)

Deputy Chair:

* Ron Cantelon (Nanaimo-Parksville L)

Members:

* Gordon Hogg (Surrey-White Rock L)
* Daniel Jarvis (North Vancouver-Seymour L)
* John Yap (Richmond-Steveston L)
Gary Coons (North Coast NDP)
* Scott Fraser (Alberni-Qualicum NDP)
* Gregor Robertson (Vancouver-Fairview NDP)
* Shane Simpson (Vancouver-Hastings NDP)
* Claire Trevena (North Island NDP)

**denotes member present*

Clerk:

Kate Ryan-Lloyd

Committee Staff:

Brant Felker (Committee Research Analyst)

Witnesses:

Ray Blake
Andrew Derrick Jr. (Gitwangak Band Council)
Howard Fowler
Ron Harris
Larry Moore
Chief Gary Williams (Chief Councillor, Gitwangak Band Council)

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MINUTES

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE



Wednesday, June 21, 2006
10:00 a.m.
Gitwangak Heritage Building, Highway 16 and 37 Junction
Kitwanga

Present: Robin Austin, MLA (Chair); Ron Cantelon, MLA (Deputy Chair); Scott Fraser, MLA; Gordon Hogg, MLA; Daniel Jarvis, MLA; Gregor Robertson, MLA; Shane Simpson, MLA; Claire Trevena, MLA; John Yap, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Gary Coons, MLA

Others Present: Mr. Brant Felker, Committee Research Analyst

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 11:12 a.m.
2. Opening prayer by Ron Harris.
3. Welcome statements by Andrew Derrick Jr. and Chief Gary Williams, Gitwangak Band Council.
4. Opening statement by Robin Austin, MLA.
5. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:
 - 1) Ron Harris
 - 2) Chief Gary Williams
 - 3) Howard Fowler
 - 4) Larry Moore
 - 5) Ray Blake
6. The Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair at 12:23 p.m.

Robin Austin, MLA
Chair

Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk Assistant and
Committee Clerk

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2006

The committee met at 11:12 a.m.

[R. Austin in the chair.]

R. Austin (Chair): Good morning. I'd like to call this meeting to order. My name is Robin Austin. I'm Chair of the Special Committee on Sustainable Aquaculture. We are here in the traditional territories of Gitwagak, Gitxsan territory. I would like to thank the people of Gitwagak for this very good welcome and for the site visit here today.

At this point I would like to invite Ron Harris to start with an opening prayer.

Prayers.

R. Austin (Chair): I would now like to call upon Andrew Derrick Jr., who is a hereditary chief, to come up and say a few words.

Opening Statements

A. Derrick: My name is Andrew Derrick. I am one of the hereditary chiefs who would like to welcome you all here — that your visit be pleasant. My Gitxsan name is Lax Skiik. Again, we'd like to thank you all for showing up here today at our heritage building. Maybe the next time you show up, it'll be completed.

R. Austin (Chair): Thank you, Andrew.

Now I'd like to call upon Chief Gary Williams, the chief councillor, to come up and say a few words.

G. Williams: Good morning, everyone — especially to the guests who have come through today to share with us our nice building. I know there are four MLAs here who want to contribute, but some other time, maybe.

[1115]

We should tell them to go out and tell those RCMP to back off over there. There would be more people here if they weren't there. They have a roadblock there. I think they're picking on us here again and stuff like that. Somebody should go over there after the meeting and chase them away. We're poor enough on these reserves.

Welcome, everyone, to the Gitwagak reserve. I'll probably make a statement about fish farming later on. But for now, as Andrew Derrick said, welcome to the territory, and also welcome to our community.

R. Austin (Chair): Thank you, Chief Williams.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the committee, to welcome you to the Aquaculture Committee's public hearing here in Gitwagak. It's a real pleasure for us to be in your community and to hear directly from you on this important topic.

I would also like to recognize that today is Aboriginal Day. It's a day of celebration. I believe it's the tenth anniversary of Aboriginal Day being instituted here. I understand it's a statutory holiday, and that's probably

the reason why we do not have a lot of community members here at the present time. Congratulations.

For your information, today's meeting is a public meeting which will be recorded and transcribed by Hansard Services. A copy of this transcript along with the minutes of this meeting will be printed and made available on the committees website at www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/aquaculture.

Today we have a number of people working with us. We have Adam Wang and Wendy Collisson, who are here from Hansard Services. They record what is being said during the hearing, and then Hansard, as I mentioned, produces a transcript of what people say, which is posted on the Internet.

We also have staff here from the Office of the Clerk of Committees. To my left is Kate Ryan-Lloyd, our Committee Clerk. Our researcher Brant Felker is at the information table at the front.

I would now like to invite members of this committee to introduce themselves, starting on my right.

G. Hogg: Gordon Hogg, MLA for Surrey-White Rock.

D. Jarvis: Good morning, Daniel Jarvis. I'm the MLA for North Vancouver-Seymour.

J. Yap: John Yap, Richmond-Steveston.

R. Cantelon (Deputy Chair): Ron Cantelon, MLA for Nanaimo-Parksville.

C. Trevena: Claire Trevena, North Island.

S. Simpson: Shane Simpson, Vancouver-Hastings.

G. Robertson: Gregor Robertson, Vancouver-Fairview.

S. Fraser: Last but not least, Scott Fraser from Alberni-Qualicum.

R. Austin (Chair): Now I would like to call upon the first witness to come up and make a presentation. I'd like to invite Ron Harris to the witness table.

Presentations

R. Harris: Thank you, all of you — and to the greatest at the end there. Not the least, then you must be the greatest — right?

I notice that you people at the table are all from very big cosmopolitan areas. I don't think you get a true feeling of how the resources are utilized up here until you actually participate in them.

I was taken away early from the reserve as a result of my mother being raised in a convent saying that the Indian culture was dead and to get away from it. She bought into that and took me away, and I was raised in cities. I've lived all across this continent. I have lived in Indiana. I have lived in Houston, Texas. I have lived in Louisiana. I have lived in Washington State, in the Tacoma area, etc. I've lived in some very large areas.

I've lived in Saskatchewan. I've lived in Alberta and all over British Columbia, where my work took me.

I've seen how resources have been managed in many, many areas. I've taken particular notice of how the aboriginal peoples in the different areas of the country and the continent itself were affected by it, and how they tried to manage it as well.

Up here, many years ago I suggested that in fact, if you want to be managing the fish, there are many streams that are dead or even streams that have not been historically salmon-producing streams that we could take and use — put the fry in them. They will go down and will grow in the ocean, and they will come back. They could be harvesting beds — period.

[1120]

At the present time the fish come back up; they hit the different fish-counting ladders, etc.; and then the gates are closed. There are all these fish beating themselves to death and dying, trying to get to spawning grounds. So even when the poor fishing years are happening, we have a large amount of salmon that actually do not get utilized.

We are going to be coming forward and presenting. We would like to step forward and suggest that the people here in the north manage it from here. Fish farming — all the reading I've done has found that it is counterproductive. People who have been in the fishing industry have told me that the fish, when they go by those areas, come up here, and they're soft. You can tell when you have sick fish, because they're not firm. It's incredible how God made nature. These fish will swim thousands of miles. They swim all the way up to return here, and when they get here, they've swum all this distance and they're still firm.

A suggestion. It's what I feel you need to do; it's not telling you what to do. I think you need to come back here in another month, if the Legislature will allow you. Take a week and let us take you through helping us catch some fish, helping us clean some fish, helping us smoke it. We'll even give you some to take away. The law is such that we can't sell it to you, but we can feed you. We're allowed to do that. We can give it to you for free, but we can't charge you for it.

You come up here and spend a week with us, and we'll show you how things are done. We'll put you with some elders, and they'll start showing you things that aren't taught in universities.

I asked an elder years ago: "Why is it that we don't pass our knowledge on to many of these different departments?" He said, "You witnessed what happened here?" and I said: "Yes." He said: "Well, they're totally wrong. In the old days we tried to, and they wouldn't listen." It's just like the Bible. There's no insult meant here, but you don't cast pearls in front of swine. It's wasted.

If you really want to find the effects of fishing, you come. We'll put you with some elders, and we'll put you through the actual catching of fish, etc. For example, when we're finished gutting and cleaning the fish, do you know that we'll take a lot of that and put it back in the river? Do you know why? You have to feed the small ones, and they'll feed off that stuff.

There are many things that are not taught in the universities. The real university is here. There's an old saying taught to me by the elders when I was young. "We grew up with the mountains and the rivers." We were taught by God that all life is sacred, because it all comes from God. We're here as caretakers. We're not owners. There's nobody here that's an owner. We are the servants that are looking after these things.

When the first non-natives landed at the point at Hazelton, at the confluence of the Bulkley and the Skeena rivers, there were four *k'amksiivaa*, or white people, in it. They were so sick that they couldn't even get out of the boat. One chief went down to kill them, because a vision had come to him that they were going to cause disease and bring more, and take away and kill most of us off.

Another chief stood in front of him and said: "No, we can't do this. It's against God's law. They are visitors. We must welcome them, even if they are sick. But I had the vision too. God also told me that yes, we are going to be decimated till we're hardly anything of what we were. But the time is going to come. We will survive."

[1125]

It's an amazing statistic, if you check it out. The aboriginal people are the only people that have youth, the middle-aged and the elderly. We are an intact people with all the ages. Everybody else is casting off a lot of different things, and the elderly are not respected. They are our libraries. They are our wisdom. They are our knowledge.

Getting back to the story. He says: "I had the vision, too, that all this would happen. But God told me that if we persevere and do what is right, which is to welcome these visitors and treat them politely, the day will come when we will come back, and they will actually ask us to look after things."

You'll notice that the pulp mill has just been sold, and what are they doing? It's the Chinese that bought it, but they're coming now, and they're holding discussions with the Gitksan to manage the wood fibre here.

For many years there were different areas where people were talking about the destruction of the fish. Finally, people are turning to the natives and saying: "What can we do, and what's wrong?"

If you really want to have some good findings, come back and visit us. Let us put you with some of the elders. Let us show you the real cycle.

I can only speak for myself, according to our people. However, I can also speak for some others that are on this petition here.

A man came to me. He's Tsimshian. He's from the coast. He's a different nation. He said that in his village they'd agreed to fish farms, but it wasn't the village that agreed to it. It was one family in power that agreed to it, and they had the political power to enter into some agreements. Well, that has apparently been withdrawn. This is the story he told me: "Our village really doesn't want it. There were incentives offered to other people," he said. "We are actively campaigning against this." He came through here two months ago.

I'll put these out, and I'll offer this to the committee. These are originals. I have photocopies still in my files. I can, in a sense, speak for these people by submitting

this. There are 45 signatures on here that say: "We don't want fish farms." So I present that to you. Please take that in for evidence.

I would also like to broach a couple of other subjects on this: aboriginal fishing and aboriginal food fishing. We have always traded. This has been a point of contention, but we've always traded our different goods for livelihoods. It's in our best interests to preserve the salmon.

I have made this observation before: when the United States wanted to bring the aboriginal people to their knees, they opened season on the buffalo and destroyed millions of them. My observation here is that as long as there are trees out on the territories and there are fish in the rivers, they can't bring the aboriginal people to their knees. It's almost as if — and I'm not accusing anybody — it's been mismanaged to the point to take the wealth away from the native people so that they will go into abject poverty and accept a lower deal than it should be.

The British North America Act. When the United States defeated England.... It was incorporated in the British North America Act when upper and lower Canada were also incorporated and the Atlantic provinces and the 13 colonies. Native rights were entrenched in the British North America Act. British Columbia, when they entered into Confederation, thought they could get away without dealing with the native people.

We were always willing, and we still are to this day, to cooperate and to joint-venture. I've seen offers that we are offering to the governments of this day. We are not stupid. We can see how the world runs. We're not going to throw you guys out. We don't want to be thrown out either.

What we want is to work together. We have offered many, many olive leaves. We have offered many open hands. We've extended many invitations for us to work together. Speaking only for myself, I would work very strongly with the government in the best interests of the Gitksan people.

[1130]

By the way, there's something I want to share with you that you may not hear very often. We are native to this land, but there are white natives here. And do you know who they are? They're the third- and fourth-generation people. When the economic collapse happened here, all the people who came here for the money left. If you look around at all the non-native people here and you start talking to them, they've been here for generations. They're not leaving. This is recognized by our people here.

Before the Indian Act came in, my grandparents had a big ranch, and they were offered a piece of paper. "If you sign this, you can keep your ranch. If you don't sign this, you have to sell the ranch and you have to move onto this reservation." So they sold it, and they sold it for ten cents on the dollar, and they moved into this tiny little place. But they tell me that before the Indian Act came in, there was always joint cooperation here. We all worked together, and we shared information, and that's what we'd like to do

here. We must set up so that the people here are allowed to continue with the fishing. It's one of the necessary things.

You see illnesses here every time we get away, when people are buying the quick foods instead of the traditionally prepared meats and fish. We must preserve that. Fifteen years ago an elder came up to me and said: "You have to look after these things." That was a commission given to me then, and I just pass that on to you.

It is ingrained within us to help preserve what is here. I appreciate you coming to hear us. I appreciate you coming, each and every one of you, to fact-find, and I invite you to fact-find some more. You certainly can contact us, and we certainly would work with you. Thank you for your time.

R. Austin (Chair): Thank you, Ron. I'd like to invite members who have any questions.

D. Jarvis: Thank you for your presentation. I'm just wondering. When you were talking about the salmon returning and the deprivation of some of those fish, has the...? I noticed that there are two hatcheries down below here. Do you have any idea how many fingerlings they put in there every year that go out to sea and if that's having any effect on the wild return?

R. Harris: This is all managed with DFO, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They basically work with the figures that they've come with. They and God know how they come up with those figures. They are caught from wild eggs. So, basically, although they're introducing more back in, they actually are from wild stocks.

D. Jarvis: Okay. There are no fish farms at this point, at least that we're aware of, north of Klemtu. So the problem's out at sea somewhere.

R. Harris: What we find is that there are some problems when the fish come up here. We're in very close contact with all the people who are down south. When I talk about the fish coming up, I should have made myself clear that we're talking through people sharing their experiences from the salmon that has gone by the fish farms down south. Excuse me if I misled you with talking about them up here.

By putting you with the elders and showing you here, we can show you right now, when the elders look at these things: this is what's wrong; that's what's wrong. They can quite often tell you from experience and the knowledge that's been passed on the things that have been happening out in the ocean. If you want to go and compare that as well, I'm sure that there are elders down there. We could put you together with some elders down in areas where the fish are going past the fish farms. They will show you what has become of the fish there.

S. Simpson: Thank you, Ron, for your presentation. I'd be interested to get your sense of how the salmon

runs are these years in terms of numbers of fish coming back and that, based on what it was like a decade ago.

[1135]

R. Harris: I'm going to start with the oolichan, which is not salmon. The strangest thing happened this year. I'm told that we had a big run of females come up, and it was at the wrong time. Then a month or so or a month and a half later the males came up. There's something really, really wrong with the cycle that's happened there.

Last year we had the salmon coming up here on this river. The species were intermingling a lot when they were coming up and being caught. You don't have so much the big runs like we used to have anymore. Last year, from my experience with my relatives getting fish, etc., it was off. There was something really wrong. Everybody was saying there's something really wrong with what's happening right now. Quite often it's because of the fishing practices out in the ocean.

Part of it also is because the overlogging, or the logging practices, has not been addressed. When I was a child — even not that many years ago, actually — when we had a rainfall, the river stayed green. We had beautiful rivers here. You look out there right now, and it's still not clear yet.

One of the biggest comments that I always noticed from people from out of the country, etc., is how beautiful our rivers are. Now, you've heard of the muddy Mississippi. I was down there, and that thing runs brown all the time. Here we have a rainfall happen up there, and we'll see the brown come through now.

Here we have hot days. The meltdown starts coming from the mountains, and the rivers come up, and they're turning brown. They're killing off the spawning areas. It's affecting the fish. Even now we've been waiting for the fish to come up. I think part of it is because of the mud and stuff that's in the water.

I guess you're addressing the salmon right now, but you have to address everything — the logging and everything. I know your scope is probably a little limited, but you have to look at this on a much wider scope, or when you're making your recommendations, I think you have to bring in some more things.

The salmon runs are affected now. The real concern that has been voiced to me by those who have been in the industry.... My father used to be a fisherman. I was in my mother's belly until she was seven months pregnant out on the ocean, and the cannery manager finally threw her off the fishboat. "You're not having babies out there on the water." So fishing is in my family and among a lot of my relatives.

Here in this village there used to be — I don't know the numbers; somebody else, perhaps, can answer that question — a lot of fishing boats here. It's down to very few now. The fish out there are depleted. Even the openings at the mouth of the river used to be large. Now a lot of the elders I've spoken to have said these should be shut right down. You've got to let the fish come up. You don't know which runs you're catching when you're catching at the mouth of the river. It has really affected....

Even with some of the fish that are coming, they're finding, maybe as part of the fishing practice out there, that they may be taking the best run that's coming up. Nature always provides for the strongest to survive. They're not allowing the strongest to get up here.

R. Austin (Chair): Thank you very much for your presentation, Ron.

R. Harris: Thank you for your time.

R. Austin (Chair): I would now like to call upon Chief Gary Williams, who I believe would like to speak on the issue of aquaculture.

[1140]

G. Williams: Welcome again, everyone. There was research done about a year ago west of us here, half-way to Terrace, and there were a lot of artifacts that got dug up. The archaeologists have proven that it is about 5,000 years old at least. It just goes to prove our existence here in our territories amongst our people. Our existence is still much alive as of today. I'm 56 years old now, and I witnessed all this as I grew as a young child and witnessed all this stuff that had gone on and how our elderly people, our chiefs, had....

All this existence that happened, I witnessed it all through my grandparents. My grandparents were big idols of mine. You hear of Wayne Gretzky being an idol, but my grandparents were an idol to me. I was raised by my grandparents, and I lived with them for a number of years. Every morning, it never failed, they prayed at five o'clock. It didn't matter which day it was — always a prayer. That's what led me to my beliefs. What they prayed for was the long-term existence of our people. They saw things out in the future that might be troubling to them. That's what they prayed for — the continuation of our existence.

The elders, when it came to salmon.... Salmon plays a big part in our tradition here. Our people only took what they needed out of the river and left the rest for the future. The elders ate and only preserved what they took. I don't know how they knew this, but they said to us — and this is advice to us: "Some day there's going to be starvation in this world."

That's how they see it for our people. It's starting to be true, in some cases, in our communities. We have welfare that's \$185 a month for our single people. The salmon used to provide for us, whether it's summer-time fresh or whether it's preserving it for the winter. If you didn't do that and if you didn't get out, you'd starve to death for the winter. If you didn't get a moose that winter, you were looking at starvation. That's how it was in the old days.

The biggest thing that I remember them saying was that someday there's going to be starvation. I'm starting to see it already; I'm starting to believe it already. All of these disasters that I'm seeing around the world — it's going to affect us, and it is.

The first people that are going to be starving here are the people that are what they call addicts, meaning

they don't like fish and stuff like that. That's the first people that are going to starve — the rich people. The people that don't like the fish, in the end, are the ones that are going to starve first. That's what they said to us. I don't know if it's going to come true, but that's what I hear.

I was talking to a few of the MLAs just prior to this meeting, and I was telling them about my encounters with salmon. I heard the question asked, "When do you see the salmon starting to dwindle down?" — or whatever it was.

[1145]

He mentioned the oolichans, and this is the first year oolichans.... You usually go down and dip net down past Terrace there and get your feed for the winter. It's not as if we take tons and tons of it and go sell it or whatever, but we take our feed for the winter. That's dipping net, filling a bucket or whatever, for your four feeds for the winter. We were not able to do that this spring here, because of the low oolichans. There were no oolichans at all this year. I heard of the Nass having these small little oolichans that went for a week and that was it. Nobody really got anything up there either.

What does that tell us? Is my grandmother starting to be right about the danger of the salmon coming back to us?

I noticed in the province here that all the first nations people are reacting the same way. I guess there are no cameras here to show the big rally they had in Prince Rupert the other day with you guys. Nevertheless, our small group here.... There are two things why there is a low attendance. Like somebody mentioned, it's Aboriginal Day today; there are functions going on around us. There is the RCMP out on the road, and the Fisheries are there — we're talking about fish here — stopping all the vehicles. Some of our people aren't coming here due to that. When you get \$185 a month for welfare — 61 percent of us — you can't just go get insurance. There are bigger issues than fish, but fish is a top one also.

I guess what I'm saying here is that we see a change in the fish habitat here. It's dwindling fast. We've never seen it like this before. It's not returning anymore. Now the Fisheries have slowly started to try to work with first nations people to rebuild this capacity. I heard mention of the fish hatchery. We have one close by here. We hope and cross our fingers this will work to restore the salmon here.

Myself, I'm a fisherman locally here just to gather my own preserving for the winter. We have a community smokehouse that has not been utilized yet. Maybe it's still early in the year, but we expect to collect our stuff and preserve them and give them to some of our elders who need it.

We don't take more than we need. I shouldn't say that. There's the odd person that abuses the system, but not very many of them. That's probably why the Fisheries are out on the road there. But no, we don't take more than what we need. We try not to do that. That's part of our culture and part of our laws not to abuse it. My grandmother says: "If you abuse it, then you pay for it later." That's our tradition, and we try to practise that as much as we can.

I hear comments on TV news — BCTV. I don't know why the heck they're not up here all the time. All they do is service Vancouver and Victoria and that's it. They don't come where the problems are. I always lay claim to that, you know. Why don't you come up and look at the issues and let it get addressed on TV and then through the Legislature or whatever? But they seem to be scared of us up here.

About 60 to 65 percent of the population in the northwest area here are first nations. We said at the last election that — and we were going to challenge Robin there — if we put a first nations in there and all 65 percent of them voted for this one person, we'd get him in. But no, our people fight amongst each other, so that didn't work.

[1150]

It would be nice to have somebody in there to have a voice — not that Robin isn't doing a good job. He's doing a pretty good job.

What I want to close with is that in this community — and I only speak for my community — there are 150 homes. I would say one-third of them — 50 of them — actually do practise and collect the salmon.

You're asking about numbers. There is the traditional chinook salmon that's happening right now. Each family will only take, I would say, maybe seven at the most for their winter supply. You put that on paper, and see how much that is. Then each family would take maybe 20 or 25 sockeye salmon for their canning and drying and whatnot.

Those are sort of the numbers. I'm saying publicly that that's all we take here. Like I said, I can't lie. There's the odd person who abuses the system. Those that do will get caught, but we truthfully and honestly try to use what we take.

Back in the old days our people used to eat all of the salmon, not just the meat itself. We would traditionally eat the head, the eyeballs; that was a delicacy back then. Some of our elders still do that because of their belief, saying: "If you don't eat all of it, it's not going to be replenished again." That's our belief, and it still is. They preach it to us. A lot of us don't do that still, but we try our best.

About fish farming. This is my own personal experience. I caught a salmon here one time, and I tried to pull the salmon through the gill, the net. The skin of it actually started coming off. I had to cut it off not to do that to the whole thing. A friend of mine said the same thing down at the commercial fishing grounds in Prince Rupert. That's very odd. I've never, ever seen that before.

The other thing is that we traditionally take maybe ten salmon and put them in our deep freezes for the winter. When you take it out in the middle of winter when you really want one in January — that's usually when they taste really good — and start cutting it up, it turns purple on you. The red meat that's inside has turned purple. I don't know what that is, but I can suspect where it's coming from. I can't point the finger at the fish farming, but that's probably where it would come from, especially when we haven't seen it before the fish farming happened.

That's my own personal experience as far as fish farming. I know that I go to these big meetings in Vancouver where the first nations summits happen. First nations, some of them, are drawn to this fish farming because of work and bad economic times on their reserve. They've been conned into it or.... I don't know if you'd say conned, but they've been lured into it because of economic conditions. They want the jobs rather than the fish, I guess. I don't know. That seems to me the main thing that I hear when I talk to my colleagues at these meetings.

Economic times. What else are we going to do? What else are we going to do in Hartley Bay or Klemtu or Bella Bella but create jobs with fish farming? That's been my experience in talking to these people.

I think that's pretty well all that I have for now on this topic. If something else comes up, I'll come back again.

[1155]

R. Austin (Chair): Thanks, Gary. I'll invite any members who have a question.

C. Trevena: Thank you, Chief Williams. Thank you very much for welcoming us, and thank you for your presentation. I have a couple of questions.

You say about a third of the families here rely on salmon, on the food fishery. What are the other two-thirds of the families living on? Do they share that food fishery, or do they find other means?

G. Williams: I guess what I meant by that is: only a few of us have the capability of going out with our boats to gather that. If somebody else wants some, they ask us, and then we catch a little bit more for those other families. That's how we help our fellow people.

The other two-thirds.... Well, like my grandmother said, if you don't harvest, you starve for the winter. They only get you \$185, and that's it. Preserving food is a big item, because everybody has to eat. You can't go to the Overwaita or Safeway as much if you just stay home and don't harvest.

C. Trevena: So really, most of the families do share in the fishery food harvest.

G. Williams: Yes, we do. We try to do that, especially starting last year. We built our own community smokehouse. We did a few by jarring — canned stuff. We do that mainly to share with the elders, as 12 percent of the community are elderly people. We tend to share with them.

C. Trevena: Taking it one step further, without the food fishery, there would be nothing. Everybody would just be relying on welfare, effectively.

G. Williams: Pretty well, yeah. There's moose hunting in the winter. That's pretty well it, and 61 percent are unemployed here, and a good part of that are on welfare right now.

R. Austin (Chair): Thank you very much, Chief Williams, for your presentation.

At this time I don't have any other witnesses who have asked to come up and speak. Is there anybody else who would like to speak?

Interjection.

R. Austin (Chair): Can you just give your name? When you come here, just say your name into the microphone so that we have your name on the record in *Hansard*.

H. Fowler: I'm going to try the best I can to talk in English. I only went as far as grade three. I hope you understand.

I can look way back. I'm 70 years old now. I'm a retired heavy faller — big trees up at Kemano 2.

Looking back, what you call [first nations language spoken] taught our forefathers about this Skeena. They call us [first nations language spoken.]

I can remember a long time ago, a creek across here. You could almost walk on top of the sockeye going up that creek, right from the shore to the shore — thousands of sockeye going up there. Then Fisheries come around and take just the eggs out. From then on, no more fish were going up there for a long time. Just a few now. They counted across there. It's not worth it anymore.

[1200]

This is as far as the healthy fish come up from down the coast — real healthy, strong fish coming up. From here it's different. They start to get weak. By the time they get to Hazelton, they're red, not worth looking at. It's not worth buying it. But over here were the healthiest fish.

The fish plant is not working anymore. I'd like to see that come back again — the fish plant. Native people here need work. Lots of them still have their fishboats, outboard motors — expensive — lying around in their yards, doing nothing with them. They have this one going again with lots of employees — good for manpower, good for everything, good for everybody.

There's a lot of things we can do with these fish. You've seen some come out of the store now. [First nations language spoken.] Why not be over here too? The same thing. We can have a supervisor for that and work together with them. We could plan.

We're not only looking for today. Our forefathers, a long time ago, when they had some supper.... Our mothers used to tell us: "Quiet. The Chief is eating. We have to respect. No noise." They got all the plans ahead, so we're doing that the same way. We're looking at the future for our children.

I'm not taking too much time here. There are a lot of people who want to say something else too. I thank every one of you who come to see us people, what we need. We'll work together with it.

R. Austin (Chair): Just for the public record, that was Howard Fowler speaking. Thank you very much, Howard.

I'd like to invite Larry Moore up to the witness table. Welcome, Mr. Moore.

[1205]

L. Moore: Welcome to God's country. It might be raining in Hazelton. It might be raining in Cedarvale, but there's sunshine here in God's country.

I'm an ex-commercial fisherman. I used to go fishing all the way down to the west coast of Vancouver Island in years past. One year we were in Johnstone Strait. A fish pen broke down there, and then we started catching all this farmed salmon. I don't know how to describe it, but they were the strangest salmon I've ever seen in my history, in my short little life. I'm 60 years old now.

We took a piece home to my father-in-law, who was a commercial fisherman too, and he cooked it. It had absolutely no taste. It had no flavour. Now, mind you, with all the chefs and all the commodities available to make this food spiced up and everything else and make it taste the way you want.... It wasn't natural salmon. Up here we're very blessed.

I'd like to say that my name is Larry Moore. I'm a hereditary chief of Gitsegukla, and I live in Gitwangak. I'm a Gitwangak band member and have lived here almost all my life. I am against farmed fishing up in the north. I'm not in favour of it. I have never been in favour of it after this particular incident that I witnessed myself. I don't agree with it.

Certainly, it may create some employment for our people, but the Creator has given us something natural here all during our history, and I don't think it should be tampered with. We have old, ancient stories passed on by our ancestors that if you start toying with fish along the river and you start making fun of it, then the fish will take you into the water and never return you.

Last summer I was very fortunate. We have maybe six or seven fishing holes east of Gitsegukla, where I'm originally from. Last summer I only got one sockeye for the whole year. This is, I think, contributed to by several things. One of the main key issues — and I've always been against this — is the seining at the mouth of the river. If you take a look up and down the river where every seine boat has been at the mouth of the river, you don't see the natural salmon coming back up to spawn again naturally, like they used to. They get wiped out.

With this introduction of fish farms, and I think this is what this is all about.... I totally disagree with it. My wife is a Tsimshian woman. She's from Gitxaala. Her father's from Gitxaala, and he's been a commercial fisherman all his life. He's passed away now. Her mother is from Hartley Bay. She's totally against fish farms also. I don't think we should be entertaining something that's artificial up around the northern part of British Columbia. Let's keep it pristine and natural, as the Creator has made it.

All our lives we grew up with changes, introductions of things that we have to adjust to as first nations people. We have to learn to be equipment operators. We have to learn to be everything else, trying to adjust

to the society that we're living in today so that we can earn a few dollars.

We don't earn any money by harvesting salmon and preserving it for our winter use and anything else like that. This is a natural giving for ourselves. That's our natural environment. It's our history. To have something as artificial as this, just for some foreigner to get rich on and hope to then disguise it as a job creation scheme.... It's really not a natural resource up in northern British Columbia; it's an artificial resource slipped in from somewhere else.

[1210]

I know that the fish we caught down in Johnstone Strait was Atlantic salmon. It was a mixture of.... I don't know. It looks like a mixture of sockeye combined with steelhead, and it's got little black spots on it like spring salmon and stuff like that. It was a very strange feeling to be picking up your net and having this strange salmon come into the back of your boat.

It wasn't till we docked and I started asking people: "What kind of fish is this?" That's when they told me: "That's fish farm. That's farmed salmon."

I don't think it's right, and I totally disagree that any fish farms of any kind, even one, are to be opened up in the northern part of British Columbia, because this is a natural resource-based area that should not be tampered with. We don't want to be living in an area....

To tell you the truth, if you've ever tasted Skeena River salmon, you'll know it's one of the best in the world. Natural salmon. It is one of the best in the world. I've gone up and down the Skeena, and the closest that came to sockeye to compare with Skeena salmon are the ones out in Johnstone Strait. When they hit the Fraser River — and I've fished the Fraser River — the water there is so warm that they're half-cooked. The fish, when it comes into your boat, is so soft that it'll fall apart when you cut it open. But the salmon up here are nice and solid, rich in oils and very healthy.

I don't think there's any guarantee that farmed salmon is going to give us anything up in this region. It'll only destroy the natural salmon because of all the things that I have seen on television in terms of sea lice and everything else that it's going to generate.

Now, we do have some sea lice way outside on the west coast, Banks Island and stuff like that, but they're minimal. They're not really that many. You can just scrub them off, and the fish haven't even been damaged yet. But if you allow farmed salmon or if you farm salmon down the coast in the identified areas, up at the top end of Petrel Channel there, that's right at the mouth of the Skeena.

The place where the fishermen catch most of their sockeye and their salmon is only a few miles up towards that, called "glory hole" to ourselves. That's where every commercial fisherman....

If you take a look at our deal right now, I'd rather be employed as a commercial fisherman than a fish farm employee. There's so much peace. You're on your own, and then you go out and work as hard as you can to catch as much salmon as you could for yourself. Then that gives you pride, and there's a lot of serenity

being out at sea. But to introduce farmed salmon is something that I'm totally against, and I know that most of our people up in the Skeena are just totally against that too.

R. Austin (Chair): Thank you very much. Oh, one second. Scott has a question for you, if you'd like to just wait.

S. Fraser: Thank you for speaking here today, Larry. I've got a question. I lived for 12 years on the west coast of Vancouver Island in Nuu-chah-nulth territory. It's some of the area that you were talking about fishing. Can I ask: what kind of gear...? Were you gill-netting there?

L. Moore: Gill-netting.

S. Fraser: When you were catching the escaped Atlantics when you were gill-netting... I know there had been escapes when I was living there, but some of the industries suggested that they wouldn't do well, that they wouldn't survive. Were they surviving?

L. Moore: The Atlantic salmon were surviving. This was up in Johnstone Strait, just down below Alert Bay, right on the top end of Johnstone Strait. Everybody was catching them when they escaped. They were surviving; they were still alive.

S. Fraser: Okay. Thank you, Larry.

R. Austin (Chair): Okay, thank you very much.

I'd like to call Ray Blake to come and present at the witness table.

[1215]

R. Blake: First and foremost, I'd like to thank all the local residents here for coming out and presenting their stories about these Atlantic salmon — these fish farms. First and foremost, what we're experiencing here is a total lack of respect for what the almighty Creator put down on this earth for us to eat.

This degradation of the salmon starts in the mountains. I used to be a logger. Up on these mountains we used to pull the drain plugs out of the engines in these skidders and high-lead rigs and everything else that burned diesel. We used to just pull those oil plugs out and let that oil back onto the earth. I'd pull all those main lines and broken chokers and just cast them out and totally eradicate ecosystems that we don't even know exist or don't care to know about.

Then as our pollutants come down from all these different side streams, they all gather into these major rivers. These rivers are running poison, and this was predicted over 200 years ago by the chiefs. They said that one day the rivers will run poison, and the fish will not be fit to eat. That goes for you, me and everybody else that chooses to eat these adulterated salmon.

These salmon, when they're being fed in these fish farms... I have learned that the people who feed these fish have to pull on some kind of protective gear so

their skin will not burn from the food that's being cast into these pens to feed the fish.

There is no greater experience than eating a fresh pot of [first nations language spoken] from a fish prepared right out of the river. I have experienced that on many different occasions. You cannot prepare [first nations language spoken] with farm-fish salmon. It's gross. I've talked to many different fisherman, and they can tell just by looking at the fish. Then that second, as soon as they start handling it, there is no firmness in the fish at all.

My dad came from Labrador, and he travelled all across this land. He met my mother out in Cedarvale. He told me a story that he used to be able to just about walk across these rivers when the oolichan run was on. Ron Harris and Chief Gary Williams mentioned the oolichans. It used to be a major trading item for the Nisga'a people. They used to come down.

I don't know whether you people have heard of the grease trail or not, but there have been many, many people over these grease trails. That oolichan grease is a very healthy item for the native population. People turn to that when medicines introduced by these pharmaceutical companies cannot address the diseases they're experiencing.

If we can carry on, let me just explain something else. After these salmon come up here and spawn and the smolts go out to the ocean to start their cycle, there is a dwell time at the mouth of these rivers where the smolts get used to that salt water. There's a dwell time there that's very important for the fish to become accustomed to that salt water from fresh water. These are where these fish farms are going. This is where all the poisons are being cast out from these fish farms, and it's affecting that small population that's coming out of these rivers.

[1220]

As we carry on stripping this land from trees to chase that almighty dollar... I've travelled around this land enough to see all the piles of debris left from these different corporations that have come in and stripped the land. These mines that are happening around the country are poisoning these lakes and causing these lakes not to be productive in fish. If we carry this on, we're all going to be standing around on a barren chunk of ground, looking at each other, saying: "What's up?" We're all going to start dropping dead left, right and centre, with no explanation. If we keep allowing this poisoning of the foods that we eat...

You can smirk all you want, but look at your young population out here. Every minute of every day, there are over two million plastic jugs dropped from people finishing their water. Our earth is becoming polluted with plastic, aluminum and corroding steel. This all goes back into the water from the rains and the snows that happen on this land. Then we're not happy with that.

The Norwegians are the ones that started this fish farm. I've spoken to Norwegian people, and they're very ashamed of their people for bringing this farmed fish idea over to this land, polluting all the water around here.

When you have to go and get geared up in special gear to go and feed a fish that you're going to be marketing out to the public, it's not a very good practice — to me. So keep that in mind. Take this back to wherever you go: do not underwrite this farmed salmon. It is poison. Let's quit poisoning each other, and learn how to grow some organic food.

R. Austin (Chair): At this time I do not have any more witnesses who've asked to come and make a presentation. I would like to point out that we are, this afternoon, going to be about 40 minutes down Highway 16 — also in traditional Gitxsan territory — in

Gitanmaax. So maybe when you go back, you can tell people here in the community that if they weren't able to come forward this morning — maybe they were celebrating Aboriginal Day, but maybe they have some time in the afternoon — they are welcome to come.

We have a few slots available for speakers to present and make submissions this afternoon, so they're welcome to come and do that. But seeing no other speakers, I'm going to ask for a motion to adjourn.

Okay. These hearings are now closed. Thank you very much for coming.

The committee adjourned at 12:23 p.m.

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