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Joint DFO/First Nations board outlines approach to seek increased 2022 opportunities for rights-based fisheries, given strong forecast, past deficits.

With strong 2022 Fraser River sockeye returns expected, DFO and First Nations on the collaborative Fraser Salmon Management Board (FSMB) have recommended that 2022 management should seek to identify opportunities for increased harvests for First Nations' Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) fisheries, outlining a proposed approach consistent with fair, sustainable and responsible fishery management.

Poor returns and environmental factors in recent years have severely limited rights-based FSC harvests of Fraser Sockeye, threatening food security for many indigenous communities. Commercial and recreational Fraser sockeye fisheries were also closed during the past 3 years as part of DFO's precautionary fishery management to help conserve struggling populations.

Indigenous groups along the Fraser Sockeye migratory route have strongly urged that their priority access rights require that DFO increase FSC fishery access and allocations for the dominant 2022 Fraser sockeye cycle, especially with poor returns and further constraints expected again in the next 3 non-dominant Fraser Sockeye years.

DFO has been working intensively with indigenous peoples and other partners to plan for the 2022 sockeye season, and FSMB members acknowledged the enormous complexity of designing sustainable fishing plans for multiple harvester groups that put conservation first, that honour FSC priority rights and other often competing obligations, and that target stronger populations while avoiding weaker stocks.

In March 2022, the Fraser Salmon Management Council (FSMC), which represents 76 signatory Fraser and approach First Nations, passed a unanimous resolution at a special assembly urging DFO to increase 2022 Fraser sockeye FSC allocations to begin making up for past and future expected deficits. Similar calls came from both FSMC signatories and non-signatory First Nations at the March 2022 Fraser and Approach Salmon Planning Forum and through letters written to the Department.

The FSMC recommendation was forwarded to the FSMB, which was established through the historic 2019 Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement (CMA) signed by the FSMC (Tier 1) and DFO. The 8-member FSMB has been working with Independent Chair Marcel Shepert to build the foundation of a new collaborative management model for Fraser salmon and this is one of the board's first key working recommendations, approved by consensus at their August 2, 2022 meeting.

- Read the full FSMB recommendation (See below)

"Both sides worked extremely hard and showed they're 100% committed to supporting the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement as we worked to find consensus," said Shepert. "The joint FSMB recommendation is a modest gesture with an uncertain outcome, but it's a hugely important step for this new collaborative table. Our job is to design and implement systemic, transformative change that puts First Nations at the table as equal partners in managing Fraser salmon for the benefit of all future generations. We face a long and arduous journey

but I'm very proud to see this group starting to move forward together. The salmon can't wait, and we are all well aware of that urgency."

Interim FSMC Executive Director Greg Witzky agreed: "This is just a first step and there's a lot of work ahead of us, but this gives me optimism that we can be a force for positive change. Our 76 delegate nations have worked very hard to respect and accommodate our diverse interests and this shows we're stronger when we work together, and sit down as equal partners with DFO and others to work collaboratively. Our challenge is to respond to the urgent needs we're hearing today, while getting to work on a new framework that will ensure healthy salmon and healthy fisheries for future generations."

The FSMB's motion urges all parties, including DFO, to use their relevant management authorities to collaborate on identifying and where possible implementing opportunities to increase FSMC member First Nations' 2022 Fraser sockeye FSC harvests by up to 25%, setting out a contingent approach subject to in-season assessment of key considerations, including conservation as the top priority.

In developing the recommendation, FSMB members recognized the challenges of implementing such a change in a complex in-season context, and the motion specifically acknowledges key management considerations and obligations that will shape the eventual outcome, noting that final decisions rest with the appropriate DFO authorities.

Finally, while recognizing that FSMC can only speak formally on behalf of the 76 FSMC signatory First Nations, the FSMB stressed that the spirit of this recommendation seeks to also extend additional FSC opportunities for non-signatory First Nations with Fraser Sockeye allocations for 2022. The board also recognized that the FSMC mandate precludes speaking for non-signatory nations and that this advice does not in any way affect the rights for any non-signatory nations.

DFO and FSMC representatives on the Fraser Salmon Management Board have agreed to engage in-season as required to support implementation of the August 2, 2022 recommendation.

Contacts:

For further information or questions, please contact:

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 - Les Jantz, JTC Co-Chair | lester.jantz@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Links:

- Fraser Salmon Management Council: <https://frasersalmon.ca>
- Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement: https://frasersalmon.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20190705_FSMC-DFO-signed-agreement.pdf
- Fraser Salmon Management Board: Independent Chair Marcel Shepert, ic@frasersalmon.ca

Full text: Fraser Salmon Management Board (FSMB) Motion approved August 2, 2022

FSMB MOTION: 2022 FRASER SOCKEYE FSC

Rationale: Whereas the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement (CMA) Guiding Principles, Schedule D states that the Aboriginal right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes has top priority, after conservation, over other users of the resource; and that after conservation, any allocation of priorities will give priority to First Nations FSC for Fraser salmon; and

- Whereas First Nations harvests of Fraser sockeye have been severely reduced due to poor returns in the past 3 years, with similar constraints expected for the next 3 years, First Nations have stressed the urgent need to provide additional opportunities for FSC access if strong returns are seen in 2022; and
- Whereas a First Nations Proposal for an FSC increase for 2022 was informed by consensus advice from the 2022 spring Fraser and Approach Salmon Forum supporting a significant increase, and by the proposal that was formally and unanimously endorsed by a quorum of FSMC delegates in a March 2022 special assembly; and
- Whereas it is acknowledged that final decision rests with DFO, as this may reflect a change from the approved 2022/23 IFMP; and
- Whereas the Department will need to consider obligations under existing, binding agreements with parties that may supersede this recommendation; and
- Whereas the FSMC can only speak formally on behalf of the 76 FSMC delegate nations, the spirit of this recommendation may extend additional opportunities for all First Nations who have Fraser sockeye allocations for 2022, and is not intended to affect in any way the rights for any non-signatory nations.

MOTION: Therefore be it resolved that the FSMB recommends the following:

That parties use their relevant management authorities to collaborate on identifying and, where possible, implementing opportunities to increase member First Nations' 2022 Fraser sockeye FSC harvests by up to 25%, subject to in-season assessment of the following considerations:

- Contingent approach: Fraser Panel needs to confirm TAC is available.
- An adaptive approach will be used to consider the possible harvest increase based on in-season availability and accessibility of TAC based on a number of factors (Management Adjustment (MAs), run-size, timing, environmental conditions, conservation constraints).
- Careful consideration to avoid increased risk of potential negative impacts to individual communities or conservation (sockeye stocks and other co-migrating species).
- Given the need to balance the urgency to act, strong prior endorsement by FSMC Member Nations and consultation requirements, it is important that the proposal/implementation be accompanied by strong joint FSMC/DFO communications.
- The potential to expand application of these opportunities to non-Member Nations based on consultations.

Moved: Pat Matthew; Seconded: Jennifer Nener; approved by consensus