



# 2024 Fraser & Approach Salmon Fisheries Forum 1

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*Kwantlen Youth: Working as one, thinking with our hearts and spirits, the wisdom of the elders and the importance of thinking outside the box for solutions to protect the gift of salmon for future generations.*

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## Background & Context

This was the first of three Fraser and Approach Fraser Salmon Forums planned for 2024. The Forums are the only venue that provides an open space for “All” Fraser and Approach First Nations to come together with the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to discuss Fraser salmon and Fraser salmon management. For DFO, it provides an opportunity to consult about its annual IFMP and overall outlook for the coming 2024 salmon fishing season. I have observed a general move toward a deeper dialogue, more focused and less combative. Much respect was generally demonstrated throughout the dialogue which is a testament to the maturity and familiarity with the process, but also the participants who have had a long history in these forums and understand the need to roll up their sleeves and find solutions to some very complex problems facing Fraser salmon.

While the process continues to evolve there has been work done on 3 Terms of Reference relating to the Forum process as follows:

1. Forum Planning Committee (updated November 22, 2023)
2. Fraser Forum (updated January 24, 2024)
3. Joint Technical Working Group (February 16 2024)

Updating the TOR's is important in order to stay relevant and timely as the process evolves. The task has been undertaken by the following:

1. **Forum Planning Committee** ( Victor Isaak, Sonora Thompson, Mat Parslow, Ken Malloway, Robert Leech, Thomas Alexis, Greg Witzky, Sharmayne Owen, Kristin Hrapchak, Amy Wakelin, Mike Staley, Maddie Thompson)
2. **Fraser Forum** ( The same subset from the Forum Planning Committee)
3. **Joint Technical Working Group** ( Maddie Thomspson, Dawn Steele, Kristin Hrapchak, Greg Witzky, Kelsey Campbell, Mat Parslow)

In 2023, West Coast Aquatics undertook a full review of the Forum process and has written a comprehensive report complete with recommendations which can be accessed at the FSMC website. The process was an extensive investigation into the current Forum process including interviews with the key proponents from DFO and FSMC, as well as from other non-signatory nations that attend the Forum on a regular basis. The objectives of the project included the following:

- ensuring that the renewed Fraser Forum is an effective and inclusive platform for discussing and addressing salmon management issues,
- aligning the mandate and objectives of the renewed Fraser Forum with the goals of the FSCMA and the current needs of the region,
- facilitating salmon management that is fair and equitable for all participating parties,
- strengthening the relationship between First Nations and the DFO,
- and improving the transparency and accountability of the Forum process.

Marc Labre of WCA attended virtually and raised some issues around the mandated First Nations versus the non-mandated First Nations and how they may respond to the overall recommendations. Because the renewal is primarily a product of the CMA, i.e. DFO and the FSMC, they must take primary responsibility for dealing with the recommendations and take the appropriate actions where necessary after which they could be circulated to the other entities with an interest on Forum renewal for feedback. Furthermore, DFO/FSMC need to ID a process to address the big questions of what will be Forum role and mandate be going forward before any recommendations for process improvements like the overall scope or further work on the TOR. It was recommended that an extra workshop be considered but no firm commitment was made. It is important to consider acting on the WCA recommendations as soon as possible while the work is fresh on everyone's minds, do not let the report languish.

**The Forum purpose and objectives** – The forum draws participants from Vancouver Island, all the way up the Fraser River; therefore, interests diverge considerably from topic to topic or species to species. The goals and objectives tend to be more aspirational /descriptive, i.e. what we do, and less prescriptive. This can lead to frustration for some participants.

Unfortunately, the purpose statements of the Forum 1 did not make it onto the final agenda but were as planned:

- *Tier 2 meetings for the purpose of providing a venue for DFO to present information on Fraser & Approach Salmon Stocks and their upcoming management plans.*
- *Tier 1 meetings for the purpose of providing a venue for First Nations to present their advice and recommendations on information and management plans.*

**FRASER AND APPROACH FORUM PLANNING COMMITTEE:**

Kirstin Hrapchak, FSMC Communication Coordinator	*Thomas Alexis, MT, Upper Fraser
*Ken Malloway, MT, Lower Fraser	*Victor Isaac, MT, Island
Mike Staley, Co-chair, Joint Technical Committee	*Robert Leech, MT, Mid- Fraser Rep
Mathew Parslow, DFO Advisor	Greg Witzky, FSMC, PGM Mgr.
Amy Wakelin, DFO	Marcel Shepert, Facilitator
Madeline Thompson, DFO	Dawn Steele, recorder

\*MT=Main Table of the FSMC.

The January Forum was planned as a hybrid meeting with nearly as many online participants as in person. Also, a brand-new venue was selected in Burnaby due to the ongoing strike issues in Richmond. The meeting space was a little tight but was sufficient. There were no windows in the meeting space which is always challenging because the air tends to get a little stale as the day moves on and participants get tired and sleepy as the day goes on. Overall, it is always a challenge to host a hybrid meeting but the FSMC support staff were exemplary and were an excellent support which made the meeting come off without any major interruptions or challenges despite some suggested improvement ideas offered toward the end of the meeting in Tier 1.

## Joint Technical Working Group – Tier 1

The chair of the JTWG rotates from DFO to First Nations. Currently the chair is being held by Kelsey Campbell from the UFFCA. The JTWG meets the day prior to the Tier 1 meeting on the first half of day 1. Their primary function is to review all of the technical data available and to the extent possible provide insights, raise questions, or present concerns for follow up in the Tier 2. From my perspective having Ms. Campbell as the lead was a breath of fresh air and she wasted little time delving deep into the issues. It is worth noting that the Tier 1 JTWG has expressed concerns about the current overall approach to sockeye management. They have identified the need to reform the way sockeye are managed due to the on-going lack of abundance. The way sockeye are currently managed was designed during a time of abundance and that is simply not the case any longer. The FN technical reps all felt that a new framework for sockeye management is required. Just how that will happen was not discussed too much but suffice to say that this could be an entire agenda topic for an entire day on its own.

On the chinook front issues continue to be raised about the MM MSF framework that DFO has been seeking feedback on, even while new MSF's are being considered. For a number of technical reasons beyond the scope of this report, representatives from the Tier 1 JTWG continue to raise concerns and First Nations were listening and responding. This issue is not going to be resolved in a Forum process, but DFO should take the concerns being raised seriously and be prepared to discuss further.

With respect to communications and the language used in these Forums careful consideration has to be given to certain language used in a "matter-of-fact way". There were a number of occasions which, to no fault of anyone within DFO, inappropriate language was used e.g. that First Nations have little interest in Pink salmon fisheries, or the way DFO characterizes certain rights based fisheries, i.e. ESSR fisheries. The preference for First Nations with respect to ESSR's is to call them, ***Stock Specific Rights Based Fisheries***. DFO was respectful and wants to do better moving forward.

The What We Heard format at the end of each Forum continues to be a positive development with both First Nations and DFO delivering the message which is a true collaborative approach

instead of only DFO. The importance of the FSMC delivering the message is equally important and cannot be understated. This is because the CMA is a collaborative agreement and with mandated First Nations their consultation imperative is real and needs to be taken seriously. That being said participants want to see the What WE Hear report out with the back eddy changed slightly. They expressed the desire to have the back eddy populated with more details, especially with respect to time lines. It has been pointed out that placing an issue or topic which is beyond the scope of the Forum is not good enough. Instead some participants would like to see a time line attached to the issue or at least a definitive statement made which declares the topic or issue beyond the scope of the Forum process.

## ISSUES ID'd

1. The overall scope of the Forum remains in questions and requires the parties to the CMA to define so that issues and interests can be better understood within the Forum process and perhaps removed altogether since they would be considered beyond the scope.
2. Participant mix of technical and managerial
3. There were no after meeting events planned which would allow for some debriefing at a different level. Considering the importance of these events and that they only occur for a short period of time and considering how intense they can be it would be beneficial to host an after-meeting event for folks to mingle and to allow participants an opportunity relax and get to know one another more personally instead of the transactional nature of the relationships being so static.
4. With a paradigm shift from harvest management to more of recovery and rebuilding the planners of these events to allow time for the 4 regions to showcase what they may be doing to rebuild or recover.
5. In line with the above recommendations is the need to review and change the current sockeye management framework to something that related to the current sockeye situation, i.e. one of little to no abundance. This implies that most sockeye management scenarios will be with limited to no directed harvest, i.e. no TAC leaving only First Nations to manage.
6. Lead time receiving presentation material remains an issue but understanding that this issue is chronic for good reason, namely that collecting the latest updated data for presentation is a challenge because it comes from so many diverse sources and takes time collect.
7. Venue selection – Given the DFO travel restrictions and ongoing issues in Richmond the choices for a venue that would work for everyone were limited. The planners did a good job in choosing the Burnaby location. That being said, the room did not have good ventilation and made it challenging as the day wore on. If a better ventilated room could be found that would improve the afternoons.
8. Timing and duration of agenda topics remain a challenge but, as the facilitator I do appreciate every attempt to at least try and figure out a time frame for each new topic.

People get passionate and it is sometimes hard to guess how long each topic might require.

9. Action tracking, and the what we heard reports were helpful but some participants want to know when those items sent to the back eddy will be dealt with. It is clear that this is linked to the scope of the forums and will require more time to decipher.
10. Folks tend to sit with like-minded or like regions or with old friends and I understand that since these meetings can get tedious but where possible these dynamics should be circumvented with more mixing to allow for table talk of a different sort.

## Thoughts on Next Steps

**Fraser Forum Meetings Structure and flow**– With the assistance of West Coast Aquatic the Forum Planning Committee can continue suggesting a wide range of changes to the structure and approach. Some suggestions coming from the last Forum are follows:

- Where possible develop realistic Goals and SMART objectives for each of the species and include a decision flow graphic to highlight when and how decisions are made. This will be helpful particularly for this nations not signatory to the CMA.
- Try to Include a mix of participants at each table including technicians, managers, policy types, newcomers with experiences in order to develop a different kind of table talk. Achieve this by numbering participants off.
- Include local and regional project showcase to demonstrate activities in the field especially as they pertain to recovery and rebuilding efforts
- Planner should include outside meeting time social events for building social cohesion and familiarity (there are many new younger less experiences participants coming to the forum and this would be a good way to build relationships)
- Every effort should be made to receive any technical presentations at least one week prior to the engagement to allow preparation time and have these posted to the FSMC website



- Recognizing that time allocations set on an agenda are difficult to set. Time allocations for certain topics requires closer examination some topics require more time than others
- Post meeting communications – there has been little to communicate out after the forums e.g. any new developments or progress, or what the hot topics were. A what we heard report will be helpful after each meeting. In 2023, there were efforts to summarize Forum input in various ways, but this remains challenging with outstanding questions about the Forum purpose and objectives, particularly with regard to consultation. Planning committee members have also raised questions about the appropriate process for distribution and approval of the Forum Tier 1 and 2 minutes.
- Having DFO and FSMC present the what we heard report on day 3 seemed to work and should also be considered for future forums. The format of the What we Heard Feedback was positively received and should remain as a prop for future forums.
- Planners should stay until the end to debrief after each day to assist FSMB and DFO in dealing with contentious or difficult situations that require a response but a careful one. That way even if the issue is tricky it is dealt with.
- Facilitator to emphasise the importance of safety for all and also to express that answers to difficult questions may be difficult to hear but it is in the interest of open and honest communication and feedback.
- Day 3 need to be more structured with a facilitated discussion on the process for renewal and on the content to ensure people stick around