

## DFOs "Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI)": A Hail Mary to try and address salmon declines?

E. Taylor, July 2021

Consider the following when reading about the "strategy" (numbered to indicate the pillar involved):

**1a.** The pillar proposes adding \$100 million to the fund to increase research on Pacific salmon, i.e., to augment the earlier committed \$142 million in partnership with BC. I'm all for research, it is what I do for a living, and I am all for research on Pacific salmon (but I do not currently conduct research on these species nor have I ever applied to the existing fund), but what is all this research going to lead to? How is it going to increase the actual number of wild spawners - the ONLY metric that matters in the end?

Examining the individual projects<sup>1</sup> already funded one sees what in most cases are undoubtedly worthy and scientifically excellent projects. That said - where is the overall theme - the overall strategic objective? How do these projects, individually and collectively, feed demonstrably into a unified end product - more wild salmon? How is this measured? Will it be measured? How does the paying public evaluate its effectiveness?

**1b.** Another proposal is for a \*new\* Restoration Centre of Expertise, and an arm's length advisory body. This sounds great but consider that we **already have** federal legislation and mechanisms to plan and implement the recovery (aka restoration) of species at risk of extinction in Canada. It's called the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The SARA includes recovery teams populated with folks that have species expertise. The SARA deals with species ranging from lichens to Polar Bears, but for some reason is deemed inadequate or inappropriate to deal with legal listings or recovery of Pacific (and Atlantic) salmon and steelhead trout (the sea-run form of rainbow trout). Only \*ONE\* of 49 groups of Pacific or Atlantic salmon has ever been listed under SARA for national recovery despite such recommendations by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).<sup>2</sup>

We also **already have** an independent, advisory panel for salmon conservation – the aforementioned COSEWIC which **also has** a Marine Fishes Specialist Subcommittee containing salmon authorities, including members from DFO! It has been around since 1977! Why would we create another entity and processes to recover Pacific salmon when we already have one (SARA) that we are NOT using? Why would this new centre be under the aegis of the organization and organizational thinking, DFO, that has contributed to the mess we are in?

**2.** We already have a Salmonid Enhancement Program (SEP) much of which revolves around salmon hatcheries. It has been around since 1977 and has probably spent well in excess of \$200 million dollars (it has averaged ~\$24 million for each of the past five years). Consider this, however; even a DFO-led self review<sup>3</sup> of SEP published in 2015, stated that (emphasis added):

<sup>1</sup><https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/initiatives/fish-fund-bc-fonds-peche-cb/projects-projets-eng.html>

<sup>2</sup>[www.cosewic.ca](http://www.cosewic.ca)

"...performance information available **was insufficient to conclude that vulnerable species are supported**" by SEP. In other words, we have tried for more than 40 years to use hatcheries to increase wild populations and can't conclude that it has done any good in supporting at risk populations- so, we'll just produce more hatchery fish. Does this make sense?


Further, it is well-know that hatchery production \*can be a threat to wild populations\* - see the latest COSEWIC assessments<sup>4</sup> of South Coast Chinook salmon (enter Chinook salmon in the search bar at left).

**3.** The closure of many fisheries is the one concrete step that will immediately save salmon as it will end the harvest (i.e., killing) of them in legal fisheries. This is a painful step for those whose livelihoods, and well-being more generally, derive from harvesting salmon - something we humans have been doing for thousands of years. Unfortunately, it is a necessary one that we are ALL going to have to pay for. The move towards more terminal fisheries will bring more, but necessary, disruption and those involved will require support. The overriding "prime directive" simply must be to build sustainable and geographically diverse salmon populations \*in the absence\* of any harvest. Only once that point is exceeded, a kind of "salmon sustainability boundary", should harvest **of any kind** be imposed. It is very difficult to see how an organization like DFO with a conflicted mandate (salmon conservation, harvest, aquaculture – see the recent Royal Society of Canada report on marine biodiversity)<sup>5</sup> can impose this kind of necessary shift in thinking.

**4.** These all seems like worthy sentiments and goals, but the description is too vague right now to properly understand what it all means.

No matter how good they make us feel, however, these initiatives won't matter a tinker's dam if they do not demonstrably lead to an increase in the numbers of wild spawners.

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ae-ve/evaluations/13-14/6B167-Evaluation\\_Salmonid\\_Enhancement\\_Program\\_Mar2015-eng.html#ch4.1](https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ae-ve/evaluations/13-14/6B167-Evaluation_Salmonid_Enhancement_Program_Mar2015-eng.html#ch4.1) 

<sup>4</sup><https://species-registry.canada.ca/index-en.html#/species?sortBy=commonNameSort&sortDirection=asc&pageSize=10>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/full/10.1139/facets-2020-0006>