

BRIEF TO THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S REVIEW ON
B. C. AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chairman: David Gillespie and participants of the review:

On behalf of the B. C. Aboriginal Peoples' Fisheries Commission (B.C.A.P.F.C.) I would like to thank Mr. Gillespie and his staff for giving B.C.A.P.F.C. the opportunity to partake in this review.

The B.C.A.P.F.C. is a recently formed alliance which represents about 60 (aboriginal) Native communities and organizations such as the Native Brotherhood of B.C., United Native Nations, Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the Aboriginal Council of B.C. The Commission was organized to assess, resolve and respond to any fisheries issues which may impact on the Native peoples. One of the B.C.A.P.F.C.'s mandates was to assist in the Native participation in the developing aquaculture industry.

However, before proceeding directly with comments in aquaculture development along our coastline, allow me to give a short history of the fisheries industry as we know it.

As you know from fairly recent written history, many Native peoples co-existed in the Pacific Northwest region of North America including British Columbia. Those historic accounts describe established self-sufficient societies or civilizations. Anthropologists

differentiated several and distinct groups which the Native peoples maintain were nations. Those nations have been described as some of the most prosperous and advanced civilizations in the Americas, that claim being related directly to the abundant resources of the ocean, the tremendous stands of forests with its associated vegetation and animal life. Of course, the major economic base for the coastal communities was the ocean fisheries. Up to eight months of the year was occupied in harvesting and processing a wide variety of food stuff for sustenance and trade. Among many other negotiations and agreements, trading and bartering were also formalized at what was known as the potlatch.

With the infiltration of European traders and the introduction of alien diseases, epidemics within a few decades reduced the Native population to a mere fraction of the former size. Complete communities were wiped out and missionaries were recruited throughout B.C. to shelter and guide survivors. In the early 1900's, the McKenna-McBride Commission established reserved lands for the remnants of the Native nations as shown on the attached maps.

However, interior Native peoples were the first group to conduct a commercial fishery, that is, to sell or trade fish with Europeans in return for money or other goods. This was soon followed by a rapid development of the ocean fishery industry throughout the

Pacific Northwest. Naturally, Native people took advantage of every opportunity to become involved in the fisheries and indeed processing companies competed for their fishing expertise. As the industry grew, Japanese fishermen and Chinese labourers were recruited. By the 1930's, Native participation in the industry fell to about 30%. Many of them did not own boats as Native peoples were not permitted privileges or rights such as bank loans, voting rights and were discouraged from higher education. Indeed their only recourse was to rent company boats or have the companies themselves finance boat sales to the Native fishermen. With declining fisheries stocks, new government conservation measures and policies plus the consolidation of fishery processing companies which became increasingly centralized, the present Native participation has been reduced to approximately 12%.

The Native population slowly recovered from the epidemics mentioned earlier, stabilizing at the turn of the century and doubling by about 1950. Since then the population increased dramatically by doubling again over the next three decades. Presently about 60% are under 30 years of age and although education programs has definitely improved we still find a large portion of this younger generation unemployed in the communities. Although their first employment preference is in the commercial fisheries industry, limited entry in several of the fisheries has effectively shut

them out.

In the early 1970's leaders from the Native communities recognized potential opportunities in aquaculture as partial solutions to impending problems facing the younger generations. Also based on Native people's historical attachment to the fishing industry and proximity to prime locations throughout coastal and interior regions make commercial aquaculture and related activities an attractive economic development opportunity.

Several Native communities have investigated and conducted pilot aquaculture projects and new interest grew with increased involvement in Community Economic Development Projects of the Salmonid Enhancement Program. In 1981, the Indian Aquaculture Task Force (I.A.T.F.) was organized (as mentioned in Dr. Pearse's Commission Report of 1982) and coordinated a proposal (1983) for the Native involvement in the developing industry.

Based on their experiences with government designed economic development programs including CEDP/SEP they recognized that aquaculture is an industry that has developed slowly over the past ten years and will not be without its successes and failures.

The 1983 report prepared by the Indian Aquaculture Task Force under the sponsorship of the Native Brotherhood of B.C. examined

the issues, problems and interest for a B.C. Indian aquaculture program. The Task Force concluded that a long term phased developmental approach was essential to ensure viable aquaculture enterprises.

However, strong opposition was voiced from a non-Native aquaculture association, stating that government subsidized projects would be unfair advantage. Such sentiments could eliminate Native involvement or at least have a restraining effect, since it is an established fact that Native communities have no other means of raising the required capital.

The federal government has identified aquaculture to be one of the agri-business growth industries of the 1980's. In order to determine the extent of a federal role, the Science Council of Canada was directed to recommend a national aquaculture policy and development plan. In March 1985, the Council stated that governments must "take concerted action to ensure that aquaculture is made an attractive area for investment and create lead agencies to co-ordinate the development strategy for this energy science-based industry".

An aquaculture industry task force was coordinated and assigned the task of advising the Science Council of Canada on the above. British Columbia was represented by the B. C. Mariculture As-

sociation and I.A.T.F. In March 1985, the task force report made fifteen specific recommendations. Among them, the Council recommended that both levels of government work with the private sector and with native groups to prepare enabling legislation to establish a legal framework for the conduct of commercial aquaculture; and, to supply financial incentives to native groups in order to ensure their involvement in the industry.

In order to pursue the I.A.T.F. recommendations, the B.C. Aboriginal Peoples' Fisheries Commission received contribution from the departments of Fisheries and Oceans and Indian Affairs for the purpose of developing a proposal for a co-ordinated long range development program. The goal of the program was to establish twenty farms within five years, and over a ten year period, ensure that aboriginal Native people's participation rate in the industry was twenty percent. This could be accomplished if special measures were taken by the federal government to put in place a framework which would address training, planning, research and development, extension services, demonstration projects, marketing, and a capital development fund.

While approval was being sought for this program, the Commission developed a plan of action to access existing sources of technical and financial resources from government agencies. Training will be addressed through proposals for Employment and Immigration sponsor-

ship of introductory and established curricula for aquaculture offered by Malaspina College. Developmental funding of pilot projects will be addressed through proposals for a lending component from the Native Economic Development Program.

The media has created tremendous interest in aquaculture development, especially in salmon farming and oyster culturing. That interest has translated into many applications for foreshore tenure throughout the B.C. coast. Leases, licences of occupation or Section 10 application approvals now number over six hundred which has caused serious concerns for the coastal communities.

As mentioned above, in 1985 the B.C.A.P.F.C. expanded the I.A.T.F. proposal in a discussion paper titled "B. C. Indian Aquaculture Development Program" and has been followed up with a survey and feasibility studies for 10 potential projects.

It was determined that such a study was required to provide a sound basis for Native aquaculture development, it was essential that a feasibility framework be developed to assess the environmental, economic and operational considerations for potentially successful enterprises. The objects of the study include the:

- i) identification of areas with the greatest potential for commercial aquaculture; and the

ii) identification of bands or groups in these areas with the management, relevant experience, and technical expertise best suited to implement and manage a successful enterprise.

The products of the study are completed professional business plans and lease applications from the Province of B.C. for the designated projects.

B.C.A.P.F.C. is presently seeking a full time coordinator to assist the successful candidates in securing the necessary support and financial assistance.

In concluding Mr. Chairman, B.C.A.P.F.C. is supportive of the developing aquaculture industry, however, they feel that the rampant growth in its early years could prove harmful in the long term.

Amongst the concern expressed by members of B.C.A.P.F.C., they are unanimous in the position that the aquaculture industry must recognize that the B.C. aboriginal Native peoples are actively seeking settlement of their land and sea claims. They state that aboriginal title and rights are a reality and that settlement agreements have been completed and are continuing today in other parts of Canada.

The B.C.A.P.F.C. is concerned that the rate of development may

have negative impacts on the wild fisheries stocks which is the backbone of the established commercial fishing industry. To members of B.C.A.P.F.C. satisfactory explanations to those concerns have not been forthcoming.

B.C.A.P.F.C. feel that there are too many speculators tying up foreshore areas restricting those who have long term interests in aquaculture.

B.C.A.P.F.C. is concerned that foreshore tenures will further restrict access to and possibly pollute the traditional ocean food gathering areas such as clam beds, abalone and seaweed zones; sea urchin and so on.

B.C.A.P.F.C. is concerned that speculation will lead to over-capitalization of the industry and with lack of proper planning will result in high rate of failure. These bankruptcies may result in the withdrawal of the necessary financial support from government and the private sector.

Lastly, the B.C.A.P.F.C. is very concerned that a suggested moratorium on issuance of foreshore tenure will create even further difficulties for Native peoples' entry into the aquaculture industry.