

The Common Voice

CCIRA Newsletter
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CCIRA



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Central
Coast
Indigenous
Resource
Alliance





Herring Fishery Violates our Nations' Rights and Marine Use Plan

In what our people are describing as an underhanded move by DFO, a herring seine fishery was opened in Heiltsuk territory on March 22 of this year before official notices of the opening were posted publicly.

Spiller Channel, where the fishery took place, is of crucial importance to the Heiltsuk Nation. The Heiltsuk have deemed this area permanently closed to commercial herring fisheries to protect their access to this traditional food and their right to harvest it. Despite assurances from DFO that our Nations would be given 24 hours notice, we were not notified of this fishery opening until it was too late to stop it.

Challenges with the herring fishery are nothing new. Last spring, conflict erupted on the central coast when Fisheries and Oceans Minister, Gail Shea, approved a commercial herring fishery in Kitasoo/Xai'Xais territory in contradiction of our Nations' marine use plan and against the advice of senior managers within her own department. But last year, our Nations' leaders had time to convince the commercial fishermen to leave Kitasoo Bay before any fish were caught.

Unfortunately, this spring's seine fishery in Heiltsuk territory was just the beginning of a weeklong conflict. After the seiners left, the Heiltsuk were forced to stand their ground to protect the herring in their territory from gillnetters that were also hoping to drop their nets.

Herring populations on the central coast are still in recovery from years of overfishing and poor management that have led to commercial fishing closures across the region for most of the last 10 years. Continuing commercial harvesting before stocks have sufficiently recovered puts this culturally and ecologically important fish in jeopardy. This risk is unacceptable to all CCIRA Nations.

“the damage to the ecosystems in our territories from the decline in herring is not just about the fish – it is another part of the infringements that continue against our people's rights as First Nations.” - Reg Moody, Heiltsuk Nation

Herring, our culture and our ecosystems

Herring provide food for our people and numerous wild-life species alike, and we have sustainably harvested and traded herring and their spawn for generations.

Yet, the advent of industrial herring fishing in our territories put increased pressure on the stocks and has led to major population declines.

Heiltsuk's Reg Moody has seen the impact of these declines with his own eyes. “When you overfish herring it affects the entire marine ecosystem in a huge way,” he says, “and these changes have a direct impact on our communities.” Reg maintains that “the damage to the ecosystems from herring declines is not just about the fish – it is another part of the infringements that continue against our people's rights as First Nations.”

Herring and our Nations' rights

In 1996, the Supreme Court of Canada's Gladstone Decision recognized our long history of trading and bartering in herring. This decision recognized our cultural ties to these fish and upheld our aboriginal right to a commercial herring spawn-on-kelp (SOK) fishery.

Reg explains that the Gladstone Decision gives priority to the rights of First Nations in the herring fishery. This does not mean First Nations have exclusive access to the fishery. But, after conservation goals are met, it means that First Nations' access should be given priority over others'.

Nonetheless, DFO decision makers have rarely respected this ruling, which has led to ongoing conflict. “Until such time that the Supreme Court's Gladstone Decision is respected, there will never be an uncontested herring fishery on the central coast,” says Reg.

Respecting the differences between gillnet, seine and SOK fisheries

Our Nations' marine use plan recognizes the major differences in the sustainability of the commercial SOK fishery, which has very low mortality, and the herring gillnet and seine kill fisheries. Accordingly, our marine use plan sets a separate, more conservative, population size cut off for gillnets and seiners. By contrast, the DFO uses the same cut off for all herring fisheries.

"This doesn't make sense ecologically, since SOK doesn't intentionally kill the fish," says CCIRA's Fisheries Coordinator Penny White. "Some fish may die with SOK, but with the gillnet and seine fisheries there is 100% mortality. Herring can live up to 10 years and will spawn many times if they have the chance, and the SOK fishery gives them that chance."

Penny is frustrated that DFO is not recognizing the different population cut offs our Nations have set in our marine use plan. But she is also concerned about shortcomings in the science they are using to manage the fishery.

Improving science and respecting our marine use plans

Through our long association with herring, our Nations believe that there are different populations of these silvery fish on the central coast. But, Penny says DFO's population estimates lump together the different communities of herring - including a population that is not commercially utilized. "Their methods make it look like there are more harvestable fish than there actually are."

New population diversity research methods being used by the University of Washington and the Hakai Institute, may provide more scientific clarity on these different herring populations. Researchers are optimistic that results of this research will show that the populations are indeed separate and require different population estimates to manage effectively.

Ultimately, CCIRA Nations want DFO to adopt a more conservative approach to this fishery. This includes respecting our marine use plan when management decisions are being made.

We won't back down

At the end of a week of widespread protest this spring that saw Heiltsuk leaders occupy the DFO office in Bella Bella, an agreement was reached and the gillnetters hoping to fish in Heiltsuk territory left empty handed. This success is a victory for all CCIRA Nations, as we all work together to assert our rights in our individual territories.

All our Nations are here to stay, says Reg Moody. "This is our home. We've been stewards up until now and we take this role seriously. It is our responsibility to ensure that others don't plunder the resources in our territories. We also have an aboriginal right to the herring fishery and it is our duty to protect it at all costs. We won't back down on this."



Vickers family harvesting spawn on kelp, Seaforth channel. Photo by Ian McAllister.



CCIRA Nations Achieve Major Milestone with Marine Planning Partnership

Heiltsuk's Julie Carpenter thinks our Nations have reason to be proud. After hundreds of meetings, three community-led studies and multiple open houses and feasts, Central Coast First Nations have transformed our traditional laws, customs and elders' knowledge into a comprehensive plan for marine management of our territories. This work has led to the development of the Central Coast MaPP plan, which was formally endorsed on January 29, 2015.

The Central Coast MaPP plan is a government-to-government marine use plan written and supported by the Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais, and Wuikinuxv Nations and the Province of BC. All this work represents a new era of marine management in the province - one that is led by First Nations - and will stand as a model for marine management worldwide. But this success did not happen overnight.

Pessimism leads to new opportunities

Julie remembers the first time the Heiltsuk Marine Use Committee met to discuss the management of Heiltsuk's marine territory. It was 2006, and a room full of elders,

fishermen, youth and chiefs had gathered in the Band Office with some coffee to discuss the issue around poor management of the salmon fishery and its impacts on their community and the marine and terrestrial ecosystems in their territory. Similar meetings were taking place in the Band offices of the Nuxalk and Wuikinuxv, and in the House of Wolves in Klemtu.

"At the beginning, I think we were all pretty pessimistic about what we could achieve," says Julie, who is now CCIRA's Community Coordinator in Heiltsuk territory, and an experienced marine planner. "First Nations have always felt that we deserved to have bigger role in how our territories are managed, but decisions about marine resources always seemed to be at the whims of industry and did not take our concerns into consideration."

But despite these original misgivings, our Nations have risen to play a leading role in marine resource management on the BC coast.



Charlie Mason strikes out in his boat from Klemtu to go fishing.

“In the past we felt we would never actually be heard and seen as a level of government. . . Now we’re seeing things move in the direction we’ve been pushing for many, many decades. Despite all the work it took to get here, I think many of us are really inspired by that.” - Julie Carpenter, Heiltsuk Nation.

Pioneering a new model for marine management

The Central Coast MaPP plan is part of a broader initiative that includes First Nations on Haida Gwaii, the North Coast and North Vancouver Island. MaPP is groundbreaking in its collective decision-making between First Nations and the Province and its application of spatial planning to the marine environment. Not only is this a unique process on the BC coast, but this process is also significant on a global scale.

Charles “Bud” Ehler, a consultant to UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in Paris, is the world’s leading expert on marine spatial planning. He was also a member of the Science Advisory Committee for MaPP. According to Bud, BC First Nations are among the pioneers in this field globally. Our Nations have helped to create an alternative way to do marine spatial planning: one that comes from the communities, rather than from National governments imposing their plans on Indigenous people and others.

“MaPP is one of the few examples where communities have led the process,” Bud explains. “It would not have gone anywhere without the resources, intelligence and willingness to get the job done that coastal First Nations communities provided.”

By taking the initiative to create our own marine use plans, our Nations have shaped this large-scale process, making sure that our concerns are taken into account. “I think First Nations have been hugely influential in making this process move ahead,” says Bud.

“The Nations aren’t going anywhere. They will be around to implement and sustain the plans over the long term – and this is a big difference compared to marine plans that have been created elsewhere.”

Holistic planning and transformation in marine management

Many marine planning processes focus only on one or two issues at a time – which can lead to future conflicts between user groups. By contrast, MaPP has been a holistic process - bringing industry, government, First Nations and other stakeholders to the table to discuss multiple issues simultaneously. These issues are as diverse as aquaculture, tourism, marine protected areas, economic development, cultural resources and more.

“It is more difficult to do things this way,” says Bud. “But in the long-term, there is more buy-in from different user groups and the plans are more likely to get implemented.” He cites examples from around the world where specific marine plans have never been completed or implemented because of conflicts with other industry-specific plans that were made in isolation from one another. “That will not happen here,” he says.

Another part of this holistic approach is the use of traditional knowledge together with western science. This will lead to the protection cultural and ecologically important areas, while enhancing local economies and respecting First Nations values and beliefs. In this way, the MaPP plan sets the stage for a new way of managing marine spaces – one that respects and combines the strengths of these different ways of knowing. This alone represents a major transformation in marine management on the BC coast.

New pride

In the 10 years that Julie has been involved in marine planning on the Central Coast, she has felt a shift within herself and other coastal First Nations people. “In terms of what we can actually achieve, I have more optimism now than I had at the beginning.”



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“[MaPP] would not have gone anywhere without the resources, intelligence and willingness to get the job done that coastal First Nations communities provided.” - Bud Ehler, Science Advisory Panel.

“In the past” she explains, “we felt we would never actually be heard and seen as a level of government in terms of how things are reviewed and managed within our own territories. Now we’re seeing things move in the direction we’ve been pushing for many, many decades. Despite all the work it took to get here, I think many of us are really inspired by that.”

One of the major funders of this work is the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. As the foundation’s Marine Conservation Program Officer, Meaghan Calcari Campbell has been working closely with the MaPP process. Meaghan is also inspired by what the Nations have accomplished. “In the global context it is rare for Indigenous governments to have this much influence on resource issues in their own territories,” she says. “This is the most multifaceted process we’ve observed. The Nations did an amazing job taking the lead.”

The Moore Foundation supports work on complex problems in science, the environment and healthcare all over the world. Yet, Meaghan explains that, for the Foundation, this project has been special. “We’re really proud to play a little part in MaPP. This process will live on in our organization’s history as one of the things we are most proud to have supported.” She adds that on a professional level MaPP is “by far the most high impact work I’ve ever been part of.”

And, yet, in many ways, the creation of the MaPP plan is just the beginning.

A foundation for implementation

The endorsement of the MaPP plan by the Province and Central Coast First Nations marks a significant milestone in realizing the Nations’ marine use plans. But to put these plans into action there is still a lot of work to do.

“We’re excited to actually see these plans get implemented on the ground and within our communities,” says Julie. “We’ve taken all the steps we thought were necessary to make sure this plan will be a positive thing for our Nations moving forward. But it is going to take a lot of continued effort.”

It is hard to over-exaggerate the amount of work our Nations have put into this planning process. But this effort has created a solid foundation that will support the hard work of implementation and help us reap the long-term benefits of this planning process.

In the months and years ahead, our people can look forward to increased marine protection and monitoring and enforcement in our territories. We will also continue to play a key role in marine management and tenuring decisions while working to develop local employment opportunities.

Our Nations’ Stewardship offices will continue to hum with activity as we face new challenges and work hard to resolve them. With MaPP our Nations have become newly empowered to work towards a sustainable marine environment on the Central Coast - one that supports vibrant economies and the unique cultures in each of our territories.



“In the global context it is rare for Indigenous governments to have this much influence on resource issues in their own territories.” - Meghan Calcari Campbell, the Moore Foundation.

Crab Research Update

In response to concerns about the sustainability of Dungeness crab stocks in our territories, all our Nations began conducting scientific research on crabs last spring. Although other Nations are still compiling their results, an interim report on crab populations at two research sites in Wuikinuxv territory has now been published.

The report outlines results from work conducted by Wuikinuxv Guardian Watchmen Brian Johnson, Chris Corbett and others at Kilbella Bay and Johnson Bay in Rivers Inlet. The results have provided new information on crab body size, their abundance at different depths, as well as population estimates for each research site. This information will serve as a baseline for future studies in the area.



Heiltsuk's Davie Wilson looking at crab data sheets

However, the report also emphasizes that legislated fishing closures are needed to bolster the research, since recreational and commercial fishers caught numerous crabs that were tagged by researchers. "Although a voluntary closure was attempted for Kilbella Bay, this was clearly unsuccessful," the report's authors write. "Clearly, for Central Coast Nations to evaluate fishery impacts rigorously, the support of DFO in legislating experimental fishery closures will be required."

As more results emerge from our research, our Nations are poised to become the leading experts on Dungeness crab populations across the central coast. This crab-specific knowledge will bolster our Nations' influence as we work with DFO to improve the management of this important resource.

Ultimately, our Nations want Dungeness crab to thrive and provide a sustainable food source for our communities long into the future. The knowledge generated by this research will help make that vision a reality.

For more information about our Nation's crab research, see Newsletter 4. You can find all our newsletters on our website at this address:

<http://ccira.ca/site/resources.html>



Dungeness crab are an important traditional food for our Nations.



Using Traditional Knowledge and Science to Restore Rockfish and Lingcod

Lurking in the deep waters of our territories is a vibrant community of groundfish. They are colourful and long-lived, and they are a tasty local food source for CCIRA Nations. Yet, many of these fish reproduce slowly and are easily overfished. With these things in mind, our Nations began a pilot study of lingcod and rockfish to provide baseline information on the state of these important fish stocks in our territories

Now, in collaboration with Assistant Professor, Natalie Ban, of the University of Victoria, CCIRA Nations are embarking on a two-year project to expand on the pilot study and explore these fish populations in greater detail. A big component of this work will involve gathering traditional knowledge to fill in gaps in the scientific knowledge of the age and size of historical groundfish populations.

Monitoring change using our elders' memories

A lot has changed since Wuikinuxv's Frank Johnson started fishing when he was 18. "We used to go out and catch our limit within an hour and then go home. Now we have to go out for two or three days to catch a couple red snapper and a halibut. After you've paid out \$500 to 600 in equipment and gas that is pretty expensive fish."

Fisheries tend to target large fish. Results from the pilot study revealed a lack of big old fish, indicating that overfishing might be a concern in some parts of our territories. And since large fish have higher reproductive rates than small fish, this could also mean the ability of these groundfish populations to replenish themselves has been compromised.

The study did not find a single lingcod longer than 85 cm. By tapping into the memories of our elder fishers, like Frank, we can put numbers like this into perspective.

"30 years ago the average lingcod was over a meter," explains Frank. He also recalls that in the past the average red snapper (or yelloweye rockfish) weighed 15 to 20 pounds. "Now it is really seldom that you catch one that big. My guess is that there's been about an 80% decline in catch of all bottom fish. I've seen the decline right from the start."

Given Frank's observations, it is not surprising that the pilot study only found one old yelloweye rockfish that approached this large size. "I would have expected a higher proportion of middle-aged fish at least," says CCIRA's Science Coordinator Alejandro Frid. But he also cautions that we need to sample deeper waters before finalizing conclusions.

These preliminary results are the reason our Nations have decided to support further groundfish research. "If we are going to manage these fish sustainably, we need to know what we're working with," Alejandro explains.

Capturing and applying our elders' knowledge

Frank has been fishing central coast waters for more than 40 years. Like other elder fishers from our Nations he is a storehouse of information about fish populations on the central coast. Within his memory is a data set that spans decades. There are no comparable scientific data for our territories.

"There is such amazing depth of traditional ecological knowledge in the communities that can enhance this research beyond what we could learn from existing scientific data alone."

- Natalie Ban, Assistant Professor, Uvic.

By working with Natalie Ban and her team at UVic, the project will compile the vast knowledge of our elders to create historical benchmarks of age, size, abundance and distribution of groundfish in our territories. This knowledge will help us understand more clearly how commercial and recreational fisheries have impacted rockfish and lingcod in our territories over the last 50 years.

“There is such amazing depth of traditional ecological knowledge in the communities that can enhance this research beyond what we could learn from existing scientific data alone,” says Natalie. “I am excited to be given the privilege to work with the Central Coast Nations.”

Work will also focus on monitoring compliance in existing Rockfish Conservation Areas. Results of these, and other, efforts will inform new policies and practices – like spatial protection and the use of descenders – aimed at restoring fish populations.

“This project will be a true success if the combination of traditional knowledge and scientific surveys help the communities implement their marine use plans,” says Natalie.

Deep connections

The connections between our Nations and the ocean run deep. The ocean sustains us culturally, economically and physically. But the fish in our waters are not just a food source for us – they also play important roles in the function and maintenance of the marine systems they inhabit. They may even guard against the impact of climate change on marine food webs. When fish populations are depleted, the marine environment can be altered, or impoverished, in numerous ways we don't yet understand.

The research our Nations are conducting is extending our reach as guardians of the marine environments that we are a part of. This is a critical and necessary role for our people. “We stand to lose a lot,” Frank Johnson says of his Nation. “If we lose all the fish, they'll be no Wuikinuxv.”

For more information about rockfish and lingcod and our Nations pilot study see, Newsletter 3: <http://ccira.ca/media/documents/pdf/ccira-newsletter-2014-03-v6-web.pdf>



Some small Yelloweye Rockfish caught on the central coast.



First Nations Enhancing Local Salmon Management

Last fall in Bella Coola, Nuxalk fisheries technicians were worried about a salmon opening scheduled for the Bella Coola river. The technicians did not have a sufficient egg-take for their hatchery and were concerned that the opening would ruin their chances. But after discussing the issue with regional DFO officials the opening was cut back from 10 to six hours and the Nuxalk got their egg-take.

This is an example of how our Nations are forging new practices with regional DFO staff that can lead to better local salmon management. CCIRA Nations are also collaborating with other Nations across the province to integrate First Nations' interests into policies about salmon management and other fisheries.

Province-wide participation

Through the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC), BC First Nations have been working closely with DFO at the provincial level to protect the health of aquatic resources and First Nations' rights and title to fisheries. The FNFC meets every four months and, not surprisingly, a big part of their efforts are focused on enhancing salmon management from a First Nations' perspective.

The FNFC is composed of 14 Council Members from different regions of the province. Using a community-based process CCIRA's Fisheries Coordinator, Penny White, has been chosen as the Central Coast representative. Penny is now one of 14 Council Members across the province.

"The FNFC works on provincial issues that are important to all our people", Penny says, "and I am honoured to be elected for this position by the CCIRA Board of Directors."

Through the Salmon Coordinating Committee – a joint committee between the FNFC and the DFO - Penny and the other Council Members work to ensure that First Nations' salmon-specific interests are recognized by DFO within their policies. The impact of this province-wide work is now trickling down to our territories on the central coast.

Local procedures and better local salmon management

In the past, a coordinated approach did not exist that allowed our Nations to give input directly to DFO officials during the salmon fishing season. But, as of 2014, a new process has been put in place that gives us a way to communicate our ideas and observations directly to DFO in-



Salmon in the smokehouse. Photo by Ilja Herb.

season. This new arrangement is how the Nuxalk Nation changed the outcome of their local fishery, allowing them to get the egg-take necessary for their hatchery.

“This is an example of the results we’d like to see,” says Kitasoo/Xai’Xais Fisheries Manager Larry Greba. “When the Nations have a legitimate conservation concern, this in-season process gives them a way to give their feedback directly to DFO at a time when it really matters.”

In part because of the efforts of the FNFC, DFO is recognizing that there are times when our people have valuable information that doesn’t come through their normal channels. “Our people are often on the water in our territories where DFO do not have a presence,” says Penny White. “This means we often have information that can enhance in-season salmon management - and DFO is beginning to recognize that.”

Penny recalls that at Klemtu last year, Kitasoo/Xai’Xais fisheries technicians noted an abundance of chum salmon that could support a fishery. Unfortunately, DFO did not have the monitoring manpower available, which caused delays in the fishery, and the quality and quantity of the catch suffered.

“But the great thing is we now have a way to share this kind of information with DFO so these opportunities won’t be lost in the future,” Penny says. She is hopeful that this process will be formalized and become standard practice within the next year.

Greater influence in salmon management

In the meantime, some of our people are also becoming bona fide fisheries monitors – assisting DFO in stock assessment in a formalized way. Collectively, these local and provincial-scale actions are giving our Nations greater input and control over how salmon are managed in our central coast territories.

Our Nations still need to break down some barriers with decision-making, admits Larry Greba. “But the Nations are getting to the next level where they are having more direct influence over how salmon are managed. These are important steps in the right direction.”



For more information on the First Nations Fisheries Council, visit their webpage (<http://www.fnfisheriescouncil.ca/>), or find them on Facebook or Twitter (@FNFish)



Pink salmon in spawning colours. The value of salmon to our people cannot be overestimated. Photo by Ilja Herb.

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About This Newsletter

Our Nations created CCIRA to build upon our success in working together to develop and implement our Nation-level marine use plans. Today, CCIRA is involved in a wide array of projects and initiatives across the central coast. The Common Voice is one source of information about CCIRA's activities in our communities. Each issue will highlight specific projects that are underway in our communities with updates on projects and policies that CCIRA is working on. The Common Voice is distributed to all central coast First Nations and is one way we are working to ensure that our communities stay connected with each other. For more information about CCIRA and what we do, please visit our website www.ccira.ca or contact us at info@ccira.ca

Your CCIRA Community Marine Use Planning contacts

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How to Get Involved

- » Visit your Community Coordinator or Resource Stewardship Office and ask about your Nation's marine use plan.
- » Attend local marine use planning open houses and community meetings.
- » Take advantage of training and employment opportunities.

Hey! Did you know CCIRA is on Facebook?

Like our Facebook page and get updates on issues and events that matter to our Nations.

All of our newsletters are on our website at this address:

<http://ccira.ca/site/resources.html>

Additional Photo Credits

Cover shot of herring spawn by Ian McAllister. Thanks also to Alejandro Frid and Tim Irvin.



Impact statement

Paper Brand
Post Consumer Waste
Total Weight
Carbon Dioxide Equivalent

Pacesetter
10 %
161.5 kg
801 kg

