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Response to Sockeye Certification by the Marine Stewardship Council

The Sierra Club BC disagrees with the determination by the Marine Stewardship Council that BC's sockeye fishery meets the criteria for being certified as sustainable, and registers its objection publicly in this statement.

While the MSC and the applicant (The British Columbia Salmon Marketing Council) might argue that the MSC assessment process was duly followed, the determination nevertheless allows a cloud of suspicion to descend over a process that is highly sought and paid for by many fisheries in their quest for market approval, namely certification of sustainability. The credibility proponents seek can only be impugned by this reckless determination of what is, beyond doubt, a depleted fishery.

Over the past 10 years more than \$500 million dollars has been spent on a Census of Marine Life, to determine how the future of the ocean will likely look. The first step was to assess, by all possible means, how the oceans were in the past. Why? It's because of what BC fisheries biologist Daniel Pauley calls the "shifting baseline." This refers to the fact that we have lost any recollection of how the healthy ocean actually was, most especially in terms of the original higher abundance, greater diversity and wider distribution of fish.

BC sockeye are complex and challenging to understand. They are genetically highly diverse and their evolutionary future clearly depends on maintaining this diversity in the face of multiple pressures. A 2006 Sierra Club study ([link](#)) documented sockeye population declines, identified the probable causes and recommended response strategies. Of 130 known sockeye runs, fully 25% were so depressed as to warrant endangered species assessment, 35% were of completely unknown status, 16% had decreased, 18% were stable and only 6%, a mere 8 stocks, were known to have increased in recent times. Things have only changed for the worse, and most especially for the decimated return of the Fraser runs this past year.

In fact the Fraser's great sockeye runs have yet to recover from overfishing and habitat destruction that occurred prior to the 1920s. In recent years, B.C.'s remaining sockeye stocks have undergone troubling declines. Rivers and Smith's Inlet sockeye – which once ranked with the Skeena and Fraser sockeye runs, in some years – have crashed, for reasons that continue to perplex salmon scientists. The Central Coast sockeye crashes appear to mirror an overall, across-the-board decline in the abundance of salmon throughout the Central Coast area – ironically, the least populated and most "pristine" area throughout the range of salmon in British Columbia.

There is no doubt that the general case for sockeye is depletion across virtually every run, and it is a matter of such concern that the Prime Minister has called for a judicial review of the state of Fraser River salmon. In parallel, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada is to conduct a study on Fraser River Sockeye. Certainly, certification should not be granted until these procedures have been completed.

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