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MIFFLIN ACCEPTS PANEL'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR B.C. SALMON FISHERY

January 9, 1997

OTTAWA -- Fred Mifflin, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, today announced that the Government of Canada is taking positive action on the recommendations of the tripartite panel reviewing the Pacific Salmon Revitalization Strategy. Mr. Mifflin has also accepted the recommendation that a vote on stacking take place in November 1997.

Mr. Mifflin announced that funding of \$35.7 million will be provided to support the panel's report. The funding will be applied to:

- a habitat restoration/salmon enhancement pilot program, with a federal contribution of \$15 million over three years. The Minister called upon the Province of B.C. to provide a matching contribution from British Columbia which would bring total funding to \$30 million.
- facilitate access to credit for troll and gillnet licence holders who need financial assistance to stack licences, with funding of \$5 million.
- a gear payment program, totalling \$8 million, to pay fishers for gear now unusable under the single-gear licensing provisions of the Strategy. The Minister also announced that he will ask the Fleet Reduction Committee to provide recommendations on how to disburse the funding equitably.
- a jointly-funded program with the province of B.C. providing early retirement opportunities for fishers who are between 55 and 64. Federal funding would total \$7.7 million. The Minister called upon the province to contribute on a 50-50 basis which would bring total funding to \$15.4 million.

"The initiatives announced today enhance federal assistance already available and allow fishers greater options to plan for their future," Mr. Mifflin said.

The Minister is also committed to ensuring continued integrity in the consultation process, and is establishing a specific consultative mechanism so that everyone can have a say. He wants to know firsthand what is going on in the B.C. salmon fishery.

"I would ask for the full co-operation of the fishers and communities in the creation of this new ministerial advisory structure, and I want to see all sectors, gear types and other stakeholders involved in this dialogue with me," he said. "I will be counting on the results, because I know that only with their support and input, can we make the salmon fishery successful in B.C."

In addition, in response to the Fraser and tripartite panel reports, a Pacific Resource Conservation Council, of between five and eight members, will be established to consult publicly on resource status and recommend measures for conservation of the resource and its habitat. "It will be a made-in-B.C. council which will also report directly to me on the science of the salmon fishery, as the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council already does for the east coast fishery," Mr. Mifflin said.

Consultations will include coastal communities and address key issues such as allocations.

"The Government of Canada is aware that communities are concerned about the impact of the Pacific Salmon Revitalization Strategy. The Department of Western Economic Diversification, through its partnerships with Community Futures Development Corporations in these communities, will work to provide support for community economic development and to help local entrepreneurs to create new jobs."

The Minister added that licence stacking, which had been frozen to allow for completion of the panel's report, would be reinstated on January 15. He added that he will allow licence stacking applications to be accepted until the fishing season begins later this year. In November 1997, licence holders in each gear type will be asked to vote on whether further licence stacking should continue. This decision supports the recommendation by the independent panel chair, Mr. John Fryer.

All parties agreed that a review of stacking was necessary and that the best approach would be to conduct a vote among all gear sectors. The federal position was that the vote should occur at the end of 1998. The provincial position is that the vote should take place immediately while the independent position proposed a compromise that a vote take place in November 1997.

"In accepting Mr. Fryer's proposal on the timing of the vote, we've shown flexibility and compromise. The federal government is committed to continue to work co-operatively with all stakeholders in the Pacific salmon fishery," Mr. Mifflin added.

As a result of the strategy, there were 30 per cent fewer boats on the water at the start of the 1996 season. This smaller fleet was able to harvest the available catch at a lower cost, resulting in an increase of \$21 million in net income despite lower salmon prices. In addition, these conservation measures have allowed us to achieve or surpass spawning escapement targets for most salmon stocks. "Over a short period of time, the panel members listened to the concerns of many individuals closely involved in the Pacific salmon fishery. The recommendations resulting from their work were very constructive and helpful in deciding the federal response. I congratulate Mr. John Fryer, the independent member, Mr. Bill Lefeaux-Valentine, the provincial member, and Mr. Mike Francino, the federal member, for their efforts.

"Today, I am starting to build a bridge to bring all people in the fishing industry together. I want this new consultation process to aid in my decision-making, to bring about a better and brighter future for all sectors of the B.C. salmon fishery," Mr. Mifflin concluded.

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