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For Immediate Release

Sto:lo leader says salmon industry missing the mark

Grand Chief Doug Kelly of the Sto:lo Tribal Council says that today heavy weights in the B.C. salmon industry will try to hold the Fisheries Minister, Geoff Regan, solely responsible for the shut down of the Fraser River Sockeye fishery. “The truth of the matter is that the Minister takes a back seat to the Fraser Panel of the Pacific Salmon Commission when it comes to authorizing commercial fisheries. Working under the Pacific Salmon Treaty, the Fraser Panel decides whether or not a commercial fishery for Sockeye will go ahead. Since the majority of the members of the Fraser Panel are representatives from both the industrial and sport fishery sectors, you need to wonder why industry is singling out the Fisheries Minister for their wrath over this summer’s fishery closure”, said Grand Chief Doug Kelly.

According to Kelly, the Minister of Fisheries has closed the Aboriginal fishery below the confluence of the Vedder Canal and the Fraser River. This step was taken to protect the endangered Cultus Lake Sockeye. However, the Aboriginal fishery above this point on the Fraser River has remained open to meet the food, social and ceremonial needs of some 70 First Nations. Decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada reaching back to the early 1990’s give the Aboriginal fishery a priority second only to conservation and ahead of both the industrial and sport fishery sectors. Kelly says that the Fisheries Minister is obliged to respect the fishing rights of B.C.’s First Nations. “The often over the top rhetoric by some in both the sport and commercial sectors of illegal fishing by Aboriginal people are really matters for DFO and the courts to deal with. Because we have not been able to resolve disputes with the Government of Canada over our rights in the fishery, we are often been compelled to fish outside the rules in order to get our issues adjudicated by the courts. Otherwise, DFO will tell you that compliance with fishing regulations is high within the Aboriginal community”, said Kelly.

Grand Chief Kelly says that the Fisheries Minister job is not to run around attempting to make everyone happy that may want to go fishing. His job description does not call on him to plump up the pocket books of the industrial salmon fleet or those involved in sport fishery charter business. His duty is to protect salmon stocks for future generations of Canadians. This summer the Fisheries Minister did not breach the Pacific Salmon Treaty. He respected decisions made by the Fraser Panel to not fish for Fraser Sockeye for fear of obliterating the Cultus Lake Sockeye run and, potentially, placing additional runs of Late Sockeye on the critical list.

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