

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

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### Introduction

The PFRCC described this summit in a press release as follows:

*The current global collapse of fisheries underscores the critical objective of this summit. People with world-class skills are coming together to look at conservation challenges and search for new solutions. Finding new answers is essential because conventional approaches are failing. There are many serious pressures on the world salmon resource. It is incumbent on us to take stock of what we know, what we do not know and what we should know to ensure that the salmon is saved and this is why this summit is so important.*

### The myth of super-abundance

On the cover of the June 2, 2003 edition of MacLean's magazine is the title, "How to Heal Nature". The article refers to the World Wildlife Fund and other groups who are trying to establish a means to make an environmental audit so that the public can understand what is happening to 'Nature', including the human population, and the economic implications of viewing the natural resources of our magnificent country as being 'free'. This article illustrates the degree to which we are challenged by the whole question of biological diversity.

*Not long ago it was hard to imagine that we would ever face shortages of fish, wood, fertile soil, precious metals and fresh water but rapacious, near-sighted industrial-scale agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, forestry, mining and oil and gas development, have changed that scenario. Despite repeated government promises to turn things around, the natural environment is under siege all across inhabited Canada.*

The comment “Not long ago it was hard to imagine that we would ever face shortages” reminds me of the book, *The Quiet Crisis*, published in 1963 where Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior for the government of the United States, stated,

*It was the intoxicating profusion of the American continent which induced a state of mind that made waste and plunder inevitable. A temperate continent rich in soils and minerals and forests and wildlife, enticed man to think in terms of infinity rather than facts and produced an overriding fallacy that was nearly our undoing – the myth of super-abundance. According to the myth, our resources were inexhaustible and it was an assumption that made wise management of the land and provident husbandry superfluous.*

With reference to the resources of the ocean, he said: “*Geography has always been a global science and conservation must now become a truly global concept if the optimum use of resources is to be achieved. Nature’s rules still attain, in all parts of the natural world from minerals and marine life to the gulf streams of the ocean and jet streams of the upper atmosphere, to obey a single set of laws. It is the seven seas themselves, the one remaining largely unspoiled, untapped resource, which now represent the largest remaining frontier of conservation on this earth.*” Most of us would not agree that today the seven seas are the one remaining largely unspoiled, untapped resource although there is no question that they are still a remaining frontier of conservation on this earth.

#### **Decline of the world’s fishing resources**

Reference to the state of the fishery resources of the globe’s oceans was recently published in *Nature* (Myers and Worm, 2003) where the authors, Ransom Myers and Boris Worm, described the findings of their study and from which I quote,

*By using a meta-analytic approach, we estimate that large predatory fish bio-mass today is only about 10% of pre-industrial levels. We conclude the declines of large predators in coastal regions have extended throughout the global ocean with potentially serious consequences for eco-systems.*

There is no question that the concerns they put forward are potentially applicable to the salmon resources of the world. With respect to Atlantic salmon, there has already been a very serious effect and Pacific salmon are no more likely to avoid some of the ravages, mistakes, and over-consumption that has plagued other species and other predatory fish around the world.

The astonishing thing is that this is not really new. I have cited Stewart Udall because the general theme of his book, written in 1963, was as applicable then as it is today. There are endless arguments among people who are in positions to issue concern or, from the government side, as to how to approach all of this. Fundamental to this is that denial is not going to get us anywhere.

#### **Getting the information out**

It is sometimes very difficult to recognize the significance of a specific problem in a particular place because it may not seem to be important overall. Yet when we take that

problem and find the others and then put them together we recognize that we have an enormous challenge in front of us.

The other side to this is if we just get up in front of an audience and give a litany of all the woes that the world faces, and all the environmental and conservation issues, and then do not offer any solutions or hope, we will send an audience home who will go to bed and not want to get up in the morning.

The World Summit on Salmon aims to be very disciplined in discussing what we know and what we do not know and to find some answers. For example, those who we elect to government are not necessarily against environment, wildlife, and wild salmon protection, nor are they against conservation, but they do need answers from the scientific community, and also from the representatives of the communities that are most in touch with wildlife and wild fish, and rivers, streams and wetlands. We have to be able to provide these people with sensible and accurate descriptions of what can be done. Remember this - everybody that we elect has to face a whole series of issues and, with respect to those around a Cabinet table, there are competing issues, not necessarily against conservation, such as highways, schools, health, defence, and foreign affairs, to name a few. As a consequence, if we cannot give to our elected representatives succinct, accurate and compelling arguments to do something and describe where it ought to be done, then we are not doing our job. There has been, for many years, a feeling of frustration among elected representatives, at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, that the science community has failed to articulate the dangers and the solutions, in a cohesive way and in a way that is clearly understandable to the rest of the world and the media. Some of the solutions are not going to be easy, especially when they involve conflicting interests, but the issues have to become a part of the public debate.

### **The example of salmon aquaculture**

As an example, I want to refer to the issue of salmon aquaculture. Mr. Yves Bastien is the Commissioner for the Office of Aquaculture Development (OCAD) in the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. His job is to try to follow the policy of the federal government with respect to the promotion of aquaculture; no doubt, he thinks that this promotion should be carried out subject to common sense and good conservation. In a recent article in the National Post newspaper he was quoted as saying, "Wild salmon stocks have been similarly devastated but while environmentalists blame farmed salmon, forestry, urbanization, industrial impact on rivers, the destruction of habitat in rivers, and climate change, all have had a huge impact. They have decimated wild stocks and yet people look at aquaculture, which has a much lower impact on wild salmon, and if they can even show a tiny impact on the wild stocks that it is good enough reason to try to stamp out salmon farming."

To be fair, Mr. Bastien has been under considerable pressure; however, there is something that he does not understand; that is, nobody is saying that those things he has enumerated have nothing to do with the dangers to the wild salmon stocks, they have had, and still have, everything to do with the danger to wild salmon stocks. But these are not the only dangers, and if we have another issue that comes forward then it has to be dealt with in a rational, objective way. We cannot slide away from it by taking the approach that, compared to all of the other things, this is not a problem. At the moment we may have issues to resolve with respect to the relationship between farmed fish and wild fish

but we cannot take the view that this is the only issue that is going to affect the survival of wild salmon. Indeed, we need to have a broad-based and even understanding of what it is that we are facing. That does not mean that we do not take some hard decisions and do not put a sharp edge on what we have to say. However, it is to say that we, especially those in government whether in the public service or political life, do not quickly take simplistic ways to avoid facing one problem by pointing to a number of other problems.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I want to bring to your attention an article published in the June 9, 2003 edition of US News and World Report "Empty oceans, why the world's seafood supply is disappearing". Under the lead page, it says, "Science and technology fished out", and it then goes on to offer hope: "It is not too late to rescue the oceans and keep seafood on our plates." The author goes to some length to set out reasons, methods and approaches that can be used to accomplish this.

As mentioned above, it is very easy to give a litany of all our woes - but if that is all we give to the public (and the media) and those we elect we are not going to resolve the problem. That is the context and challenge that we face today. As Chair of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, which has joined with others in organizing this event, I want to say how much we appreciate being here and how much we appreciate the efforts of many people in this room, over a number of years and sometimes against considerable difficulties, to advance the knowledge and also the instinct for the conservation of our wild salmon stocks. In closing, I want to add this - it is a reality and a truth that our First Nations, our native people, have viewed the salmon and their return, as part and parcel of, not just their physical life, but also their spiritual life. We now have generations of people who are not First Nations, but are now part and parcel of this, and other communities who have very much the same respect and awe and even spiritual recognition of the salmon. Let us keep all of these things in mind and diligently apply our minds and our energy to finding answers.

### **References**

- Myers, R.A. and B. Worm. 2003. Rapid worldwide depletion of predatory fish communities. *Nature* 423:280-283.
- Udall, S.L. 1963. *The Quiet Crisis*. Holt Rinehart and Winston. New York.