

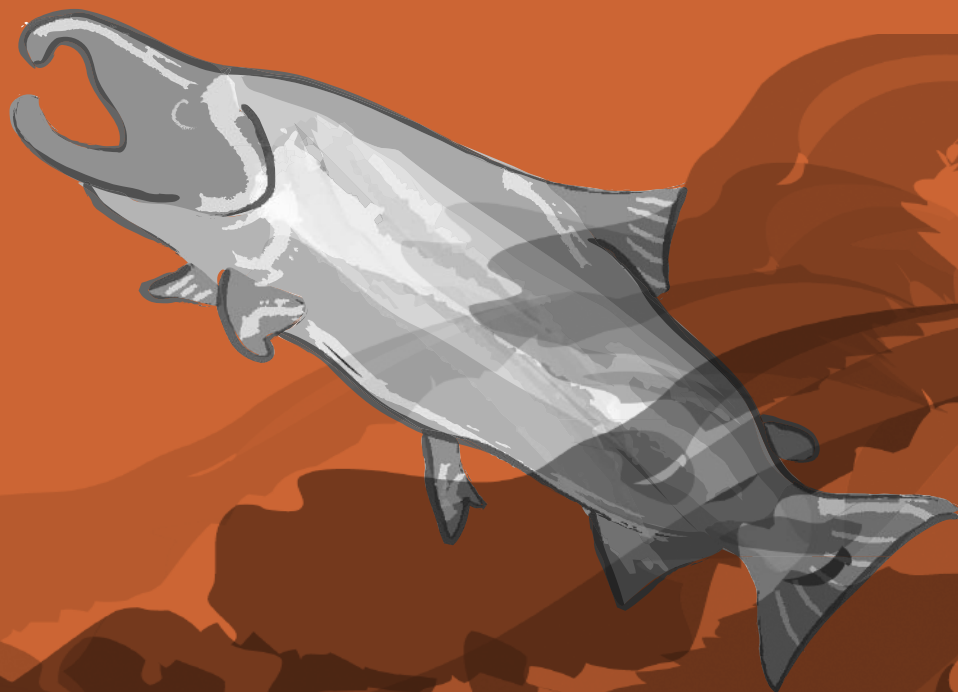
# IMAGINE BC

*Dialogues on the Future of British Columbia*

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

## YEAR 1

Bowen Island · October 2004



# CONSENSUS STATEMENT

Reporting out November 24, 2004 • SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Vancouver

## *Introduction*

---

*“Imagination defies the constraints of expectation and the everyday and it is the means by which we discover who we are and what we might become.”*

– Max Wyman

What might be possible by bringing together a group of intelligent, curious and passionate British Columbians—of diverse ages, professions, geographical and cultural backgrounds—to explore the one thing they share in common? The future of British Columbia.

For three days on a small island on BC’s West Coast we gathered—an architect/industrial designer, physician, health care executive, professor of planning, epidemiologist, labour relations specialist, electrical engineer, environmental writer, federal policy advisor, cultural critic/commentator, university dean/professor of geography, First Nations Chief and a social sector leader—and explored three core questions:

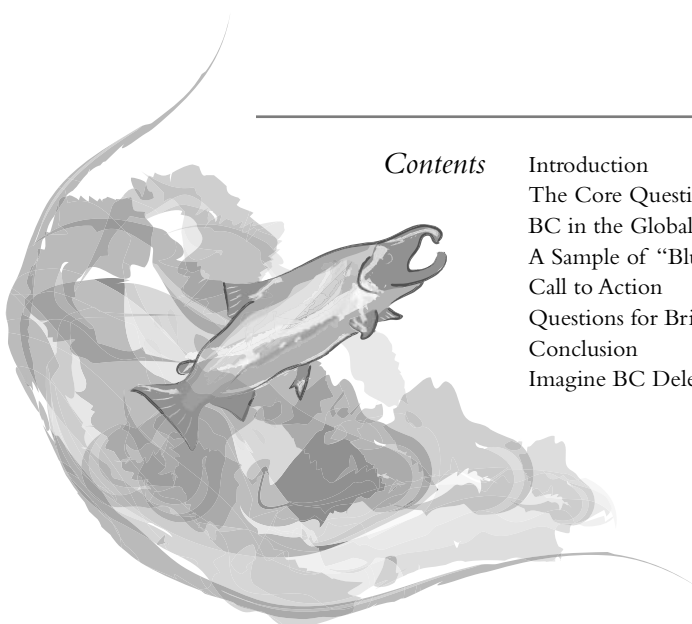
- Is there, as yet, a distinctive British Columbia culture?
- How might we have economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and healthy communities in BC?
- What should BC be in 30 years and what are the choices we have to make today?

The dialogue produced hours of tape, pages of notes, and multiple ideas and visions. This document reflects the initial interpretation of the material and the consensus produced by the group. It includes a set of imperatives and related persistent questions. This consensus statement is intended to invite further dialogue and exploration of the future of BC and to begin to set a course for a series of dialogues involving as many British Columbians as possible over years to come.

The *Imagine BC* dialogue series is an exploratory and interrogative approach. It is aimed at deeply inquiring into the way things are, the way things ought to be, and the values and choices possible to create a livable future in British Columbia. Our conversations attempt to bring a quality of imagination to these complex questions. And we do this with a sense of urgency and purpose as well as with a sense that time is limited and choices must be made today if we want to have an impact on the future. As we speak we are losing species, the human footprint on the land is growing, and opportunities for innovation are being lost. There are too many people adrift. Our capacity to define these challenges accurately and make decisions wisely will determine our future.

---

<i>Contents</i>	Introduction	1
	The Core Questions	2
	BC in the Global Context	4
	A Sample of “Blue Sky Thinking” on the Future	6
	Call to Action	7
	Questions for British Columbians	9
	Conclusion	10
	Imagine BC Delegates, Program Director and Credits	11



## *The Three Core Questions*

---

### **Is there a distinctive BC culture?**

Four overriding themes marked this portion of the dialogue. First, a shared love of and connection to the land; second, a recognition of the immense cultural and linguistic diversity in the province; third, an excitement and optimism about the future based on our identity as a province ‘on the edge’; and fourth, an urgency around the need to reconcile our relationship with First Nations.

#### *Love of the land*

To have a common vision of the future we need to discover a common mythology. We began by acknowledging a shared love for British Columbia as a land and as a culture, its possibilities and dichotomies defined by its geography: its unbounded frontier nature, its wildness and ruggedness, its richly varied landscapes. This distinctive spiritual connection to place—linked to aboriginal culture but not restricted to it—is part of what makes us who we are.

#### *Cultural diversity*

The immense wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity is a distinguishing feature of BC culture. It is a persistent strength. Such diversity in ecosystems is a sign of health and resilience and it is also true in human communities. BC is a place of convergence, where Europe meets Asia, where mountains meet the sea. We are shaped by a sense of settler angst about appropriating aboriginal culture. BC’s culture is also profoundly defined by its economic history: we live in a resource based economy, an “old growth” paradigm with a huge potential and optimism for an emerging “new growth” economy. We also recognize the tendency of the province to lead from the cities with people from outside the Lower Mainland feeling abandoned and often excluded from crucial decision-making. We have allowed our rural towns and historic roadside culture to vanish like “dust in the wind” in favour of “world class” big box development and urban sprawl.

#### *A province “on the edge”*

We are very much on the edge of the country, separated by mountains from the rest of Canada. The province has a frontier consciousness and several regional identities. It is not unusual for

residents from the eastern part of BC to have more in common with neighbours in Calgary or Spokane than those in their own province. BC is unlike other western provinces as it was not the creation of the federal government, but was an entity prior to joining Canada. BC is older than Canada itself. With our “edginess” comes a sense of possibility. We are more active and healthy than the rest of the country. And with a sense of abundance and entitlement, we risk not valuing all that we have—environmentally, socially, economically, and culturally.

#### *Relationship with First Nations people*

We share a sense of unsettledness about the lack of resolution with First Nations peoples in this province. The aboriginal artwork on display at the Vancouver International Airport for arriving travellers is a touchstone for most—crystallizing the tensions we feel between our deep appreciation for and pride in the First Nations art that is beautifully displayed, and the constant reminder that we have yet to reconcile our sense of cultural appropriation and our relationship with First Nations.

Whether of settler or aboriginal origins, we agreed that the aboriginal symbols and myths are deeply respected by most British Columbians, although not necessarily understood. Such lack of understanding reflects, too, a general lack of genuine connection and understanding of First Nations culture and values. Amid some aboriginal communities, elements of the growing youth population have a sense of frustration and hopelessness, and in other areas the culture is reviving with the youth learning their traditional languages, customs and stories. The leadership expresses profound concern about the well-being of First Nations youth.

We need to build a mythology that embraces all of our traditions, a mythology in which everyone sees their deeply held values and heritage included.

Yes, there is now a BC culture, we concluded, although the definition is problematic and emergent; there are elements of connectedness to the land and there is a sense of optimism that is closely related to this connection. Paradoxically, a shared mythology exists and we need to

continue to construct this mythology; beyond the particularities of different groups. Questions remain: Can we attain a sense of unity without uniformity? Can we create a new, cohesive BC culture inclusive of all? To what extent will BC be able to determine its future in the face of population expansion and urbanization? And in the face of compelling national and global forces?

### *BC in the Global Context*

---

The future is highly unpredictable. We should not be surprised by surprise. Informed by BC-born scholar, Thomas Homer-Dixon, we looked at the exogenous shocks that BC might experience over the next 30 years—tectonic pressures—changes around the planet that could turn things upside down.

Global tectonic stresses include: energy shortages, climate change, terrorism, disease, the widening gap between the rich and poor and the potential for instability in the international financial system. Such problems are exacerbated by: the increasing complexity and pace of networked systems; the increased capacity of small groups of people to destroy things and people and the rise of fundamentalism.

Thirty years ago the Soviet Union was intact (even in 1985, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was unanticipated); AIDS did not exist and now it has killed 20 million people and affected a total of 60 million people (it is a pandemic that has just begun). There was no hole in ozone layer. No Worldwide Web.

But what about between now and 2034? The tempo of change has increased exponentially and Homer-Dixon assures us that the changes of the last 30 years will seem minor. To respond to the unpredictable, he suggests, we need to build buffering and resilience into our system—to cope with whatever comes down the pike. We need sufficient scenario planning. We need some plans on the shelf. We need some financial and human reserves. We need ingenuity and flexibility.

We are now creating incredibly unresilient systems. Just look at the blackout in eastern Canada and the United States last summer—if it had gone on for two days, there would have been massive casualties among seniors housed in high rises, trapped in airless buildings with no elevators. Such a system is not designed for shocks—it is configured as though everything will work perfectly, but this is clearly not true.

One of the central challenges for humanity, Homer-Dixon suggests, is the capacity of societies to adjust to rapid and complex change; we can reduce environmental damage but those societies that prosper and do well, are those that can adjust to changing circumstances very effectively. But what are the factors that determine adaptability? Why is it harder and harder to adjust? Truly, the world is a more difficult place to live in and our ability to respond to problems is what he refers to as bridging the ingenuity gap.

## How might we have economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and healthy communities in BC?

Although sobered by Thomas Homer-Dixon’s loud wake up call, we do not lack faith that it is within our reach to have economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and healthy communities. We recognize that these dimensions are equally necessary and are inextricably intertwined and interdependent. Each one relies upon the other.

*Economic Prosperity* refers to the generation of wealth, and also means equal access to human rights such as health care, education, employment, and cultural enrichment. Our current standards have to be raised – we need a different “floor” for the “have-nots” in future. Other elements of economic prosperity include choice, trust, cultural engagement and personal enrichment.

*Environmental Sustainability* includes the visible natural world—trees, water, mountains—as well as the water and air that we take for granted. The built environment and what we create must be included in this definition (most British Columbians spend more time in buildings than in nature) as well as the cultural environment. Sustainability refers to making decisions today so as not to compromise the future.

*Healthy Communities* are characterized by the conditions conducive to human health and well-being, including the social and economic determinants of health, and the built and natural environment. In this sense, the health of a community and its individuals goes beyond the physical health and includes diversity, trust, respect, public engagement, basic security, and freedom from violence, as well as choice, civility, and a pervasive generosity of spirit.

Not satisfied to simply identify these values and interwoven priorities, we need to define the acceptable minimums for each region in BC in each of these interdependent spheres. (This includes the disabled and those most marginalized in society; and raising the lowest levels of what we should tolerate.) We are also aware that these indicators cannot arise from the people in this dialogue group; but must come from each local community and region. The creation of these indicators must be inclusive of geography and population.

## What should BC be in 30 years and what are the choices we have to make today?

We envision a healthy, diverse, and resilient culture whose peoples and governments are committed to the integration of economy, society, and environment moving toward a just and sustainable future.

We share an existential connection to the land that leads to a desire to preserve it to the greatest extent possible. This involves respecting the land in its natural state and making a commitment to live in a way that sustains our environmental quality, our generosity of spirit in terms of cultural diversity,

and a deep appreciation for the enrichment of life that comes from such diversity. Present choices involve evolving from the present economy and cultural framework that is driven by natural resources to a broader based economy with an emphasis on human resources.

## *A Sample of “Blue Sky Thinking” on the Future*

---

*Note: These are not weighted in terms of priority or consensus among the group. This list simply represents the range of ideas that emerged through the dialogue.*

- economic prosperity—BC tops by 10% any state or province in North America in real purchasing terms
- a business environment that would draw the best people from around the world; people who are attracted by lifestyle, not necessarily money
- we consume less and live within our means
- unparalleled access to education in all regions of BC resulting in unmatched levels of educational achievement across North America
- more compact and resilient higher-quality communities resulting in a reduced human footprint on the land
- population about 6 million and stable
- environmental metrics stable or improving
- highest level of community health in North America based on health, security, and participation of the population in governance
- evidence that “have nots” in our society have more than in any other jurisdiction in North America
- presence of a recognized, locally-based cultural industry that is in the top 10% of North American states and provinces
- BC is ranked as the most desirable place to live and work in North America
- connectedness between Lower Mainland and the rest of regions of BC characterized by a partnership and an understanding of each other’s roles
- communities having and meeting aspirations, and exercising choice in developing local economies and in fulfilling their education and health care needs
- as a population, we have learned to consume less
- we live in harmony with the environment
- respectful collaboration with First Nations peoples with understanding and agreements in place between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples
- generosity of spirit enhances all of our lives
- all children would be ready to learn, in all ways
- all children would have a home
- a culture in which youth have big dreams for themselves and for their possibilities in areas of employment and education
- a strong youth-centred culture that plays a pivotal role in our collective culture and supports resilience, health, and creativity
- a society that measures success by what is happening with marginalized peoples
- our built environment is as beautiful and sustainable as our natural environment
- a society that people 100 years from now would look back on and say, “Here is an evolved society”
- free education at every level
- every family is able to have a home with an income derived from working no more than 30 hours per week
- there is no such thing as special programs for aboriginal people, whether it’s health, education, housing, etc., because these programs are not needed
- a population distributed more evenly throughout the landscape with human culture and its ecological footprint contained within bio-regions in a way that does not disrupt ecological functioning.
- move wilderness and food production back into Vancouver—e.g., rooftop gardens
- restoration of abundant/diverse salmon runs; join with First Nations in this initiative
- homelessness is no longer a concern
- redefined education system in which full human needs are considered and fully integrated
- strengthened conflict resolution systems and a reduced jail system
- clean air
- the use of fossil fuels is obsolete (100% tax on cars as in Singapore)
- crossroads of culture; everyone is equal; all cultures included and celebrated
- government-funded urban core districts of creative excellence in which business and the arts are brought together
- human fulfillment and personal obligation toward the greater good is the underlying value base
- BC is internationally recognized and studied as a society that is sustainable at every level.

## *Call to Action: Imperatives and Persistent Questions*

---

We highlight below central themes worthy of serious consideration and which bring into focus the interrelated concerns of the present that will have a profound impact on the kind of future we imagine for BC 30 years from now. Also noted are the questions arising from each theme. These questions are meant to invite further dialogue and discussion.

**Youth.** It's their future. There is a strength, fearlessness, power and presence of youth and we need to seek ways to partner with them. We need to involve them in decision-making and in defining the concerns for the future. We need to find out what questions matter to them. Currently, only 25% of youth are involved in political processes. If we were to involve them in problem-solving, there could be an outpouring of involvement and innovation.

*Question: What ways can we support efforts to engage youth in public decision making?*

**Education.** Education is a driver for a sustainable economy and healthy community. It is a means to many ends—i.e., if you improve education (e.g., self-responsibility) then you don't have to spend as much money on health.

Access to education is a right of all BC citizens. Education helps us understand resilience, an essential quality for meeting the local and global challenges that have the capacity to shake our world. We refer to resilience at every level—in individual lives, households, communities, institutions and society. All problems are highly interdisciplinary, and an emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to education will contribute to developing ingenuity. Learning for a complex future requires bringing together the advanced study of science, technology, and the arts with the recognition of their mutual interconnectedness.

*Questions: What are the models for education that integrate all other fields?*

*How is education linked with the celebration of diversity and the celebration of environmental values?*

*How do we get across to people that complex problems require non-linear responses?*

**Health.** Health care spending in 2001–2002 was 9.5 billion or 38% of the provincial budget; in 2004–2005 it is 10.6 billion or 42% of the provincial budget. Even the health leaders point out that health care costs are growing twice as fast as our provincial economy and at current rates of growth that are not sustainable. As futures thinkers we recognize that consuming such a significant proportion of our provincial budget in one area may threaten strategic investments in other areas.

Health is more than health care. The health system should reflect values of sustainability, efficiency, and responsibility. It should recognize that the health of British Columbians is impacted by all elements of society including environment, education, and cultural enrichment. It should also be informed by a sense of community and belonging. An emphasis on individual and community responsibility should counterbalance our sense of entitlement to health care. We have a right to health care but we must also recognize that health care resources are limited. We have a responsibility to live in ways that reduce our health care needs.

*Questions: The biggest improvements in health involve a persistent focus on children's health. How do we invest in children's health in a sustainable manner?*

*How might we reduce waste and increase efficiencies in the health care system?*

*How will we respond to the growing aging population?*

*How do we, as a society, come to grips with dying? Three quarters of the health care costs are in the last six months of a person's life.*

**The Economy.** An evolution from an old growth economy to a new growth economy requires a shift in emphasis from an unsustainable economy—based on natural resource depletion, generating short-term wealth and cultural dependency—to a sustainable, knowledge-based economy that generates wealth for human needs and is derived from renewable human capital, cultural expression, and creativity. Elements of this shift include a productive and competitive trading sector, unlocking the development potential of BC’s diverse regions and creating local socio-economic sustainability through community economic development and community resource management. We recognize the need to go beyond an exploration of how to distribute wealth to a serious examination of how to create wealth. We don’t want a “spending budget” scenario and we acknowledge the need for a highly productive and efficient economy.

*Questions: Who will create the resources and the wealth?*

*How do we enlarge the necessary capital (social, human, economic)?*

*In the knowledge-based economy, how should wealth be distributed to ensure that the knowledge worker stays in BC?*

*What are the trade-offs between individual and social rights?*

*How do we address the gap between the rich and the poor?*

*What steps should be taken to build capacities in communities? (e.g., economic literacy)*

*What alternative development models should be explored?*

*To what extent can BC determine its own future in the face of rapid population expansion, urbanization, and a dependency on global markets?*

**Relationship with First Nations.** In order to move the BC agenda forward we have to reconcile our relationship with First Nations.

*Question: What can we do to reconcile this relationship?*

**Relationship between Cities and the Rest of the Province.** In order to address the urban-rural imbalance, we need to define and understand the relationship between the Lower Mainland and the rest of the province.

*Questions: How can we contribute to reconciling this relationship?*

*How can we ensure that built environments are sustainable?*

*How can we ensure that heritage legacies are appreciated and protected?*

**Diversity.** The immense wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity is a well-marked feature of BC culture. It is a persistent strength. Such diversity in ecosystems is a sign of health and resilience in an environmental context, and it is also true in human communities (although it’s important to acknowledge that such diversity also creates instability in systems without cohesion). Monocultures are vulnerable to disease. Multiculturalism creates resilience in the system with respect to disease. The more pluralism within our value system, within limits, the better. Diversity in spiritual/moral values is a healthy possibility—e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism and First Nations spirituality can teach us about the natural world. In Canada, as a whole, and in BC, in particular, we need to pay close attention to this.

*Questions: How will we realize the potential of BC’s diversity?*

*How will we ensure that BC’s diversity becomes a positive and constructive force in BC’s future?*

*What are the trade-offs in creating a balance between individual and social rights?*

**Decentralized Approach to Ingenuity.**

This is an ecological approach to problem-solving by creating multiple groups linked together within a loose information network. Power is distributive rather than hierarchical. Such groups would be allowed to search for solutions with as much autonomy as possible, successes are rewarded along the way with failures viewed as learning opportunities for all. For example, competing multi-disciplinary teams might be charged with solving the homelessness problem. It should be noted that competition can be creative as it focuses people’s minds in addition to structuring incentives.

**Increase our Buffering Capacity.** Too often the planning and political cycles we are working with involve short-term annual benchmarks. We need to get beyond the minimum response necessary and look to long-term responses and plan for significant shocks and stresses.

*Questions: How might we shift from problem-solving with one-off disciplinary frameworks and cultivate a culture of creative experimentation—ie., front-loading ingenuity that increases our buffering capacity?*

*What are local, national and international examples of such decentralized approaches?*

Creative ideas come by supporting preferential reproduction of good ideas, networked groups instead of hierarchical organizations, and the transfer of these ideas to different contexts. Through small groups of people, we see the potential to experiment with distributed problem-solving methods. Such efforts require:

- A collective effort to reach effective and sustainable solutions.
- Resources such as knowledge, data, expertise, finances and jurisdiction inherently distributed between stakeholders.
- Agreement by problem-solving groups on how tasks will be segmented and allocated and on how new knowledge will be shared and synthesized.

**Questions for British Columbians**

---

What is the most important objective for BC for the next 30 years?

How would you explain and justify your vision for the future of BC to the residents of China, India and Africa?

What do you imagine for the future of your children and the children of others in BC?

How can we “bring the floor up” (re: economical and social disparities) while respecting the planet’s biophysical limits? (e.g., ecological footprint reduction)

How can we redefine prosperity in non-monetary terms in order to reduce our human footprint?

How can we change our mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance?

Is poverty permanent?

What would you want BC citizens to dialogue around? How can we bring together the people who live in BC’s cities with those who live in the rural/regional areas of the province?

How do we engage BC youth from diverse cultural, ethnic, economic and regional backgrounds to focus on their future in BC? How and what can they contribute?

What opinion(s) held by others in BC—that you’ve heard through the media or community conversation—do you not understand? What questions could you ask to explore this “uncomfortable” idea?

This process appears to have at its heart a relocation and expansion of leadership and changes the way we envision the relationship between this leadership and governmental decision-makers. What will government look like?

## *Conclusion*

---

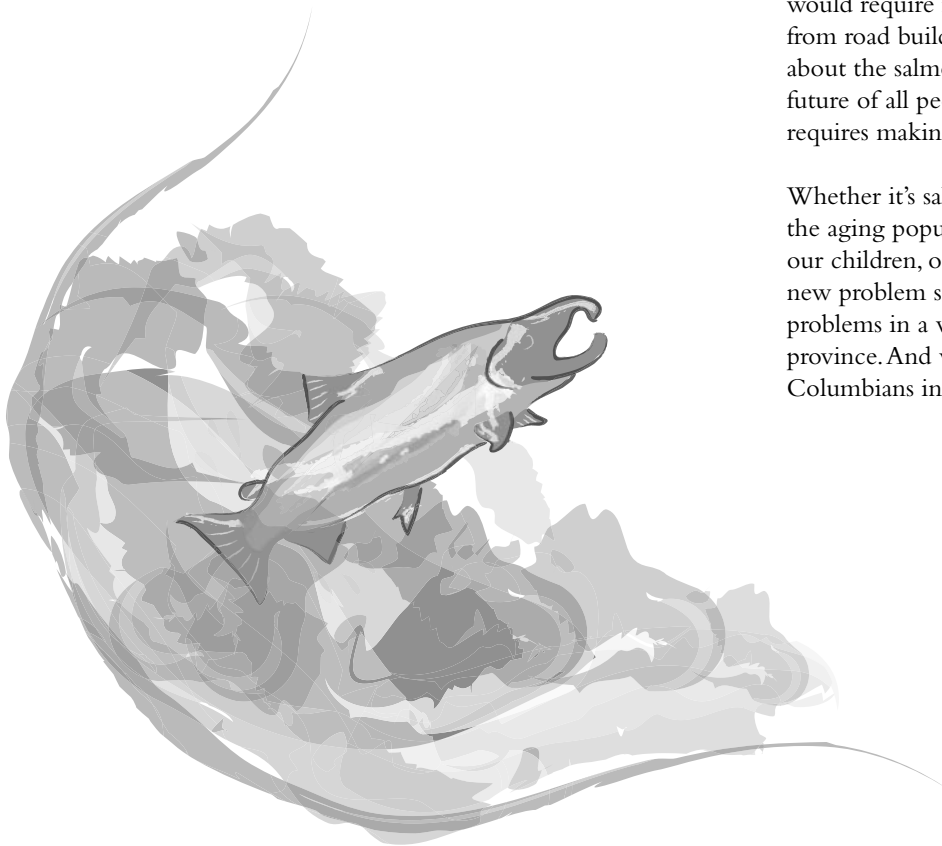
Addressing the diversity of problems and exploring the richness of opportunities that guide us into our optimal future, we denizens of BC can learn from the salmon whose ingenuity, resilience, and persistence have inspired us since the beginning of time.

### **The Iconic Salmon**

The salmon is already an icon with BC residents from Haida G'waii to the Rocky Mountains. It is what makes us care about this place. The salmon is a creature that has always been swimming at the vortex of cosmologies of aboriginal people. People and salmon have co-evolved here. When we talk about the things that we love, we are necessarily inarticulate. Salmon have become a metaphor for what we care about in British Columbia.

Our vision of BC's future involves restoring the abundance of salmon throughout their former range. It will require feats of engineering heretofore unprecedented. It will require restoring robust stands of timber and clean water. Salmon and humans want the same habitat. The restoration of salmon in all of their abundance and diversity would require fundamental infrastructure changes, from road building to community planning. To care about the salmon is to care about the sustainable future of all peoples and species in BC and it requires making imaginative choices today.

Whether it's salmon, homelessness, mental health, the aging population, educating and caring for our children, or creating wealth, we need to bring new problem solving strategies to our complex problems in a way we have yet to do in this province. And we need to involve more British Columbians in the dialogue about the future.



## *Imagine BC Delegates*

---

**Omer Arbel**

*Architect/Designer*

**David J.M. Butcher, MD**

*Vice President Medicine*

Northern Health Authority

**Nadine Caron, MD**

*Endocrine Surgeon*

**Terry Glavin**

*Writer*

**Nancy Hall**

*Epidemiologist*

**David Helliwell**

*Senior Policy Advisor to the Hon. Stephen Owen*

Western Economic Diversification Canada

**Kevin Huscroft**

*Hi Tech Entrepreneur*

**Thomas Hutton**

Centre for Human Settlements

University of British Columbia

**Jan O'Brien**

*Vice-Chair*

BC Labour Relations Board

**Susan Papadionissiou**

*Director, Agency and Community Services*

United Way of Lower Mainland

**John Pierce**

*Dean of Arts and Social Sciences*

Simon Fraser University

**Sophie Pierre**

*Chief*

St. Mary's Indian Band

**Max Wyman, OC**

*Writer*

## *Program Director*

---

**Joanna Ashworth**

*North Growth Management Director of Programs*

Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Simon Fraser University

## *Writing and Documentation*

---

**Donaleen Saul**

*Writer*

The Write Step Services, Ltd.

## *Special thanks to...*

---

**Tony Penikett**

**Freydis Welland**

MORRIS J. WOSK

# Centre for Dialogue

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

## *Imagine BC*

---

Under the leadership of Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue and with the generous financial contribution of North Growth Management Ltd., *Imagine BC* is a public dialogue initiative to explore British Columbia's current reality and possible futures.

*Imagine BC* began with passion and with genuine questions: What kind of future do we want? What kind of choices will we have? What actions are necessary today?

### *Imagine BC* seeks

*to create:* a network of interdisciplinary innovators who will generate provocative and constructive ideas about the kind of future we want for BC

*to engage:* British Columbians in meaningful public dialogue, transcending partisan politics, about our province's future

*to produce:* a number of educational materials that support public dialogue on BC's future

*to cultivate:* a culture of dialogue that engages citizens and specialists/experts/thought-leaders to consider our future from multiple perspectives

*to contribute:* to public judgment about what choices we should be making for a sustainable future

*to influence:* public policy discussion regarding emerging economies, social, cultural, environmental issues and opportunities affecting BC.

### *Imagine BC*

Dialogue Programs, Continuing Studies  
Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre  
515 West Hastings Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 5K3

[www.sfu.ca/dialogue/imaginebc](http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/imaginebc)