

A Symbiotic Bureaucracy and The Demise of PSFI

OPINION

There appears to be a whitewash that allows DFO and the large fish processing companies to maintain control of the system.

BY TIM LYNCH, INFO-LYNK CONSULTING, INC.

In his book *Economics and the Public Purpose*, John Kenneth Galbraith described the relationship between the US defence industry and the Pentagon as a form of “symbiotic bureaucracy.” He documents how officials in both organizations feed off of each other’s role through setting up organizational structures and relationships to serve their mutual interests. Galbraith discusses how the arms industry firms, through attractive consulting contracts, would retain senior Pentagon officials when they retire. Another tactic was to set up advisory councils ensuring further employment of public servants following their retirement. These activities were orchestrated to ensure that the preservation of the decision-making process was retained within a close grouping of political elites. Galbraith states:

“In the symbiotic relationship between the public and private bureaucracies no conclusion can or should be reached as to where the initiative lies. Certainly no one can say with assurance that it is with either the public bureaucracy or the firm. What is clear is that the initiative does not come from the citizen.”

The June 2004 edition of *Fisherman Life* reported on a meeting of some 40 fishermen held in Fisherman’s Hall in Delta, April 21, 2004. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a new organization called the *Pacific Salmon Fisheries Initiative (PSFI)*. PSFI was intended to provide a means through which fishers could communicate effectively with government and quasi-government agencies and to respond to government reports on fishing (to see previous reports = www.infolynk.ca/bcfishpolicy.html).

During an interview to discuss the demise of PSFI, Bruce Lansdowne, and Walter Cadwallader, seine boat owners and founding board members of PSFI, expressed concern that Area Harvest Committees and the Integrated Harvesters Management Plan overseen by the Canadian Salmon Advisory Board was being set up to be managed through a kind of symbiotic bureaucracy between officials at DFO and representatives of the large Vancouver-based fish processing companies: McMillan Fish, Ocean Fish and Canadian Fish.

Lansdowne said, “The purpose of PSFI was to provide a vehicle through which all boat owners and crew members could have a more active role in policy formulation and decision-making. We

envisioned being able to establish a secretariat structure that would serve to present the position of crew and boat owners in the Area Harvester Committees that were being created to manage our existence.” He further stressed, “The primary purpose of PSFI was for fishers to get their telephone calls answered just as quickly as the big processing companies.”

Cadwallader added, “Large companies and DFO work in collusion to do what they see is best for their interests. This is what we oppose. The new arrangement was supposed to bring fishermen into the system and fishermen were supposed to be running their affairs. There appears to be a whitewash that allows DFO and the large companies to maintain control of the system, particularly in the seine sector.”

Ian Angus, who served as the volunteer Acting Executive Director, stressed, “The present system shows a tendency to be more exclusive than inclusive. There is a need for a forum that will include all fishing interests – commercial, sports, environmentalists, stream-keepers, and First Nations – if we are to satisfy all interested parties. Having a plan we could all agree on for ensuring the sustainability of salmon over the long term was critical.” Angus referred to the October 2004 Simon Fraser University futurist Consensus Statement, “Imagine BC”, which identifies salmon as a metaphor for what British Columbians care about, and states:

“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.”

Lansdowne and Cadwallader expressed concern that with their combined ownership of the seine fishing licences the fish processing companies control about sixty per cent of seine fishing industry, with Canadian Fish holding close to 40 per cent. This concentration of ownership was said to be killing off the independent solo opera-



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tor, or any individuals wanting to invest the high capital costs in seine boat fishing and create their own business. Young people no longer see the fishing industry as a viable career option on the West Coast as they did in the past. Individual entrepreneurs, who are the foundation of the industry, are reluctant to make large upfront investments in starting a fishing business today.

It was stressed that the perception and fear among seine boat operators in particular is that the Harvest Committees, and Canadian Salmon Advisory Board are being established to provide collaboration between DFO staff and the management of the large processing companies. Politicians tell the public that such structures are democratic; however, the way the fishing industry licenses are acquired the voting power in the system is in the hands of the large companies. Repeatedly this process of power sharing is said to be anything but democratic.

The opinion expressed, and frequently heard among West Coast fishing folk, is that the DFO bureaucracy is independent of any political accountability. Regardless of the individual politician who might be appointed as Minister of DFO, or what political party is in power, it doesn't matter. The DFO bureaucracy is said to have functioned for a number of years as if it is independent of any public accountability.

There is recognition that the federal cabinet has not been supporting DFO over the past decade, and consequently the organization has been shrinking. This has created a sense of insecurity among DFO staff, which is easily exploited by the big companies relative to the degree of influence smaller fishing interests can have.

Under these circumstances the priority for Department staff, many of who have no affiliation to fishing culture and tradition in BC, is described as in "survival mode."

Conversation with Cadwallader and Lansdowne revolved around the processes of government with its endless agencies, boards and commissions, which are always supplemented by expensive pseudo-academic consultant reports that constitute a decision-delaying mechanism and creates work for DFO staff. In the absence of some secretariat that can translate fishermen's interest in such councils, the matters discussed were said to be somewhat lopsided. A secretariat structure like the proposed PSFI is urgently required to navigate issue of importance to fishers efficiently through the system as well as explain the rituals of government "bureaucratise" to the fishing community.

Another concern expressed by Lansdowne and Cadwallader was that the processing companies control the destiny of the seine boat fleet by controlling the votes taken at the Area Harvesting Committees, as well as most other committees established by DFO. The voting system is based on license holders, and the big fish processing companies have acquired the majority of licenses in the province through their ownership of most of the seine boat fishing fleet, which, of course, influences the voting behaviour of other members of committees who are dependent on them for sales and supplies.

This concentration of power among the political elite prevents grass roots fishing interests from having an equitable say in the deci-



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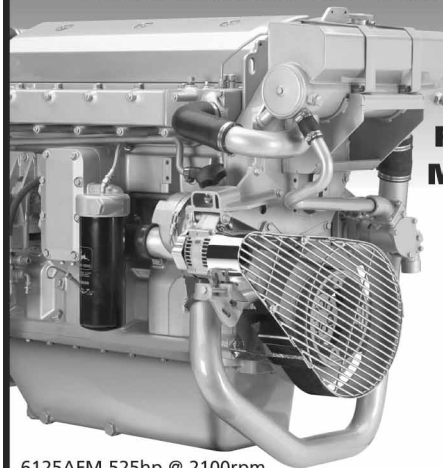
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sions that critically affect their daily living. The fact that DFO staff allowed this to happen was seen as evidence of collusion. According to Lansdowne, "A more equitable voting process would see two votes per license – one for the owner and the other for the operator. This kind of a voting, in a secret ballot structure, would be particularly beneficial to the seine boat sector giving the operator some influence in the decision-making process."

Recognizing that their grass roots initiative to build an infrastructure that would represent fishing interests in the councils of government had failed to take off, Lansdowne and Cadwallader stressed the need for fishers to work constructively within the Area Harvester Committee structure that is evolving. Both stressed that it is only by working actively within the emerging structures that fishers will be able to monitor what is going on, achieve some degree of advocacy, and perhaps some element of fair play in the formulation of an Integrated Management Plan for West Coast fishing.

A critical component of the newly emerging structure to oversee the management of fish in BC was seen as being the individual responsible for providing overall administration. The consensus of the two industry leaders was that such a position needed to demonstrate credibility of independence from government and the fish processing companies. More important than having a technical background, they felt that the yet-to-be-appointed Executive Director who will oversee any management plan should display more business ethics and conflict management expertise than have a set of values based on a previous career path. Lansdowne stressed that such an

individual needs to be seen as being approachable by all parties and in a better position to adjudicate differences of opinion among the different parties. The fear expressed is that the selection committee established to recruit this individual would likely pick one from within their own ranks, thereby perpetuating the symbiotic process.

A healthy tension between Government of Canada politicians, bureaucrats and the provinces is part of being Canadian. What makes British Columbia a distinct society within the Canadian federation is its historical and cultural relationship with salmon. A genuine sense of this "distinctness" is evident all the way through the futurist report, "Imagine BC", along with a realization that the challenges being confronted by the province can best be resolved among British Columbians. This sentiment of provincial ownership of the problems and the need for new structures to resolve them is expressed in the report's concluding statement:

"Whether it's salmon, homelessness, mental health, the aging population, educating 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."

As with all start up, grass roots, non-governmental organizations, the inauguration of PSFI was dependent on volunteers for its existence during the past year. Lansdowne and Cadwallader thanked the 350 members who paid the nominal membership to join PSFI and especially those individuals who gave generous financial contributions towards maintaining the office.



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