



Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council

# The Salmon Aquaculture Forum: Briefing Note to Ministers

*Prepared by*  
The Honourable John A. Fraser  
& Kenneth Beeson

December 2003

## **The Salmon Aquaculture Forum: Briefing Note to Ministers**

The Honourable John A. Fraser & Kenneth Beeson

**Copyright © December 2003 Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council. All Rights Reserved.**

For non-commercial use, you are welcome to copy and distribute this document in whole or in part by any means, including digitally, as long as this copyright/contact page is included with all copies. As well, the content may not be modified, and no reference to the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council may be deleted from the document.

Commercial users may use the material as above, as long as access to it by the general public is not restricted in any way, including but not limited to: purchase of print or digital document(s), singly or as part of a collection; the requirement of paid membership; or pay-per-view. For all such commercial use, contact the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council for permission and terms of use.

The limited permissions granted above are perpetual and will not be revoked by the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council.

Note that this document, and the information contained in it, are provided on an "as is" basis. They represent the opinion of the author(s) and include data and conclusions that are based on information available at the time of first publication, and are subject to corrections, updates, and differences or changes in interpretation. The Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council is not responsible for use of this information or its fitness for a particular purpose.

For quotes and short excerpts from the material covered under "fair use", we recommend the following citation:  
Fraser JA, Beeson K. 2003. **The Salmon Aquaculture Forum: Briefing Note to Ministers**. Vancouver, BC: Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council.

For further information about this document and about the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC), contact:

Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council  
800 Burrard Street, Suite 590  
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6Z 2G7  
Telephone 604 775 5621  
Fax 604 775 5622  
[www.fish.bc.ca](http://www.fish.bc.ca)  
[info@fish.bc.ca](mailto:info@fish.bc.ca)

ISBN 0-9733951-2-5

# THE SALMON AQUACULTURE FORUM: BRIEFING NOTE TO MINISTERS

*Submitted to:*

The Honourable Stan Hagen, BC Minister of Sustainable Resource Development  
The Honourable John van Dongen, BC Minister of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries  
The Honourable Geoff Regan, Minister of Fisheries & Oceans Canada

*Prepared by:*

The Honourable John A. Fraser and Kenneth Beeson  
on behalf of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC)

## 1. Issue

In April 2003, ministers agreed on behalf of the governments of Canada and British Columbia to establish a Salmon Aquaculture Forum. Its purpose is to improve public dialogue and seek constructive solutions to controversies associated with salmon aquaculture. It is to provide a basis and process for stakeholders, First Nations and the public to become better informed and contribute to finding practical solutions to genuine and perceived problems.

## 2. Background

Ministers asked the PFRCC to engage stakeholders and First Nations to help define the organizational architecture, participation and procedures of the Forum. We were asked to suggest how an innovative organization could build public consensus and identify practical options for salmon aquaculture's future in British Columbia. During the past summer, we carried out an extensive round of meetings, bilateral discussions, informal roundtables and interviews across the coastal areas of the province. This also involved research on the practices of advisory and consensus-building organizations in aquaculture and other resource sectors. Based on that work, the document entitled *The Salmon Aquaculture Forum: Discussion Paper on Findings and Practices* was produced. It sets out background information and perspectives for the recommendations and options contained in this briefing note; the information contained in the discussion paper indicates in most cases why the proposals on each point are being put forward.

## 3. Forum's Purpose

The Salmon Aquaculture Forum should provide a transparent on-going mechanism to advise governments and inform the public on what is required to achieve an environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable salmon aquaculture industry in British Columbia. It should provide the ways for stakeholders, First Nations, governments and the public to build consensus and contribute to finding solutions to the controversial issues. It should serve several purposes, but should be given a mandate to focus its attention and resources on: enabling respectful dialogue; sharing and examining information; building agreement on situations, conditions, information needs and trends; and, providing advice to governments.

The Forum's functions should be to inform, initiate, convene, study, report, investigate and persuade. It should enable public input and encourage constructive dialogue. It needs a capability to encourage joint fact-finding and work towards establishing practical criteria to assess risks and benefits related to salmon aquaculture.

## 4. Principles and Criteria

The Forum should act with the following basic precepts:

- **Inclusive**—encouraging and enabling public input
- **Transparent**—providing openness to public scrutiny for all proceedings and activities
- **Respectful**—showing consideration of all participants, valuing their views and contributions
- **Trust**—encouraging confidence in the character, honesty, and reliability of participants
- **Balance**—establishing and maintaining equilibrium in representation, perspectives and considerations
- **Independence**—acting with autonomy to set its own agenda, and operating without undue influence by government or other interests
- **Open communication**—facilitating dialogue and informing British Columbians about the issues related to salmon aquaculture
- **Shared responsibility**—empowering Forum members to determine the direction of their work and ensure their productivity
- **Accountability**—reporting and ultimately answerable to governments and the public
- **Fair**—pursuing dialogue and activities in ways that are scrupulously evenhanded and impartial
- **Effective**—demonstrating value to all participants, and achieving tangible results
- **Efficient**—operating responsibly with due regard for the need to be cost-effective and to focus on tasks and outcomes
- **Flexible**—being adaptable to consider emerging issues and changing priorities
- **Commitments**—maintaining productive involvement by all participants and governments
- **Confidence**—contributing a sense of certainty in defining future directions, and encouraging continuous improvement in practices and activities
- **Integrity**—earning recognition and respect

## 5. Elements of the Organization

The following features of the Salmon Aquaculture Forum are recommended to Ministers:

### Institutional Structure

The Forum should adopt a commission organizational model, with a total of six or seven individuals each representing perspectives and backgrounds, but not serving as delegates or representatives of stakeholder or First Nations organizations. The Forum members would take on a role similar to that of commissioners to the extent that they would focus on fact-finding and, where possible, develop consensus among themselves. They would be involved with stakeholders and First Nations to obtain a combination of public input and dialogue.

## **Leadership**

The characteristics and qualities of the person chosen to serve as chair to lead the Forum will be crucial. This individual should be seen to be well-informed about fisheries and resource issues, and have the respect of all parties for demonstrated fairness, judgment, trustworthiness, and ability to build consensus.

## **Membership**

There should be six or seven persons, including the chair, appointed to serve as members of the Salmon Aquaculture Forum. The members should have personal characteristics similar to those of the chair. They should be impartial, respected for their judgment and constructive attitudes, and able to demonstrate that they are fair, reasonable, collectively representative, and creative in seeking solutions. On a collective basis, the backgrounds of the members should include environmental, aboriginal, industry, communities, fisheries and public sector perspectives. The members should be chosen to embody a balance of different perspectives; they would not serve on behalf of any particular organizations or interests.

The federal and provincial governments could each be involved on an informal or ex-officio membership basis in the Forum. Their role would be to provide liaison with their governments in addition to their technical input and information sharing.

## **Stakeholder Involvement**

The active involvement of stakeholders representing environmental, consumer, industry and business interests should take place in ways that enable respectful engagement with one another, but not involve the negotiation and bargaining that are typical of some advisory groups comprised of interest group representatives. The Forum members should involve stakeholders primarily by inviting and considering their views and ideas through submissions and presentations on issues and, at times, enabling dialogue to take place among them in moderated discussions. The public and stakeholders should be given full access to the proceedings of the Forum and have opportunities to present their perspectives.

## **First Nations Involvement**

The unique status of First Nations could be acknowledged in the Forum through various means, including their involvement as members, and in ways similar to stakeholders. As providers of traditional ecological knowledge and perspectives from local communities with immediate exposure to salmon farming and fisheries activities, the full and active involvement of First Nations is an imperative.

## **Reporting Relationship**

The Forum could report to the new Pacific Council of Fisheries Ministers responsible for aquaculture, enabling the two levels of government to have a mechanism to maintain effective liaison with Forum members.

## **Selection Process**

The choice of members of the Salmon Aquaculture Forum, as well as the other fundamental decisions about the nature and mandate of the new organization, should initially be left to the discretion of the federal and provincial ministers responsible for aquaculture. It will be important for overall balance in backgrounds and perspectives to be assured, in line with the principles and criteria outline earlier in this briefing note.

## **Sponsorship and Resources**

The federal and provincial governments should equally fund the Forum and provide the primary resources for its work. The Forum would be serving a valid and necessary public service, and governments are the only organizations in a position to provide the long-term commitment of funds that are essential. At the same time, the two governments should enable the Forum to operate independently, without controlling its agenda or establishing conditions that could be perceived to be manipulation or constraints. A two-year commitment of resources for the Forum should be made by the governments, with a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness and results after the first year. The federal portion should come from DFO's national aquaculture funds, not the Pacific region budget.

The Forum could also seek funding from other sources to replace at least a portion of the government funding.

## **Staffing**

Support personnel should be selected by the chair, hiring staff directly or arranging a performance-based contract with a provider of administrative services. The use of facilitators could be valuable, and they could be chosen by the Forum members to help them lead discussions and encourage the development of consensus. Arrangements for staff secondments from the two governments could also be considered as in-kind contributions of resources.

## **Local Issues Process**

Other organizations and processes at the local and regional level could act in conjunction with the Salmon Aquaculture Forum to deal with issues such as monitoring, siting and aquaculture development, that require consideration. The encouragement of this second-tier activity to consider specific coastal zone and watershed issues was suggested by several stakeholders. Federal and provincial governments sponsor various regional planning, watershed and area management organizations to provide local input. Some already have involvement in salmon aquaculture. A pilot project could be established to determine how an appropriate structure can be arranged, particularly to identify the issues to be addressed at that level.

## **Technical Support**

The Forum members should call on the resources of governments, academic institutions, and stakeholders to provide data, operational information, traditional ecological knowledge, scientific findings and evidence-based research. The Forum should work towards combining scientific and traditional knowledge to determine the criteria for evaluating risks, benefits and costs of salmon aquaculture. The Forum should maintain close liaison with the BC Aquaculture Research & Development Committee in identifying aquaculture research priorities. It should also make use of the resources available from the Consultation Secretariat of the Pacific region of Fisheries & Oceans Canada to implement its operating principles.

## **Public Profile**

The Forum should become visible and accessible to British Columbians, and help make information on salmon aquaculture readily available. The Forum should become a definitive public information source, and provide advice to enable the federal and provincial governments to become more effective in their own public information programs. Meetings of the Forum should be held in communities across the province, and particularly in coastal areas, to encourage public involvement in the discussions and dialogue.

## Public Involvement

The members of the Salmon Aquaculture Forum should carry out their work by involving stakeholders, First Nations, community organizations and the public to solicit their ideas and gather information through means such as written submissions and presentations about their positions, questions and concerns. The stakeholders and First Nations should be encouraged to engage in an on-going and constructive dialogue with the Forum members and with one another in moderated discussions and events.

## Initial Activity

The Salmon Aquaculture Forum should meet four to six times each year in various locations. The members should develop a series of statements on salmon aquaculture to serve as responses to Frequently-Asked-Questions (FAQs) dealing with commercial, community, environmental and health-related issues. The Forum's initial pursuit of consensus should focus on determining agreement among the members on the contents of their FAQ statements that could eventually lead to the production of State-of-the-Debate reports similar to those of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. This should involve joint activity with stakeholders and First Nations to seek agreement on positions and to state the differing views or continuing points of contention where they exist. This could involve identifying where further information is required and what constitutes risks and benefits.

## 6. Alternatives in the Approach

What has been proposed in the preceding section is what we consider an ideal organizational arrangement that could fulfill all of the objectives, principles and criteria for the Forum. Given the realities of budget limitations and government priorities in other areas, three options and alternatives approaches could also be considered.

The first alternative is to establish the Forum as an entity that is restricted to discussion and dialogue. In that model, the Forum would hold public meetings and roundtable discussions, but not engage in a process of establishing consensus. It would provide an opportunity for public and stakeholder involvement, but not attempt to resolve points of conflict or lead to agreement about the issues. The Forum in this mode could consist of just three members whose role would be to lead discussions, sponsoring occasional public meetings or events. Their activities would be limited to those described under the Public Involvement heading shown above. This approach could possibly be considered an initial stage for the Forum and, if it proved to be workable, be expanded later to include consensus-building.

This first alternative would be lower-cost, but might not fulfill the objectives of resolving controversies or enabling reconciliation of the various points of view. It would entail a risk of the Forum turning into just another opportunity for posturing and positioning of the entrenched views of stakeholders.

The second alternative would be to have the Forum act as a medium for discussion and negotiation. In this model, the governments could select a facilitator to hold discussions at a table comprised of all interests, stakeholders and First Nations. In essence, the facilitator would focus on dispute resolution. The Forum's activities in this instance would permit an airing of views and involve processes of facilitated negotiation among the participants. Mediation could be employed to assist in dispute resolution, compromise and deal-making in the series of meetings. This would be somewhat similar in structure to the process of the Commission on Resources and Environment.

The key shortcoming of this second alternative is that it might mistakenly presume that the stakeholders and First Nations would want to participate in a negotiation, or that there are actually issues among them that could be resolved by deal-making. It is also not clear that stakeholders or government officials would be willing or able to become engaged in such dispute resolution processes.

A third alternative would be for the governments to adopt the proposed model, but introduce some variations in timing and administration to minimize the costs. For instance, the Forum could be managed through an existing independent organization or through contracted services to share facilities, part-time staff and use common resources. Funding could be sought from a combination of charitable foundations and the aquaculture industry, as long as there were no strings attached that would undermine the credibility of the outcomes.

It has not been intended to present these three alternative approaches from the perspective that they would be inferior, or that the recommended proposal is the only realistic one. The options should be given due consideration. There are aspects of our recommendations that could be accepted or rejected; the important point is to ensure that the Forum can fulfill its mandate and perform the tasks it is meant to perform.

Some features of the Forum are absolutely essential, including its independence, transparency, balance, accountability, inclusiveness and fairness. The establishment of the Forum as a government-led organization or one that operates within a government department or agency is not an option. To do so would undermine its credibility. At the same time, government officials could be involved in the Forum on more than an observer basis. For instance, the Forum should not conduct research in its own right, so government officials, academics and other resource professionals should be involved in a technical support role.

## 7. Proviso

The start-up of the Salmon Aquaculture Forum should not assume that the stakeholders or First Nations would make any immediate changes in their strategies and activities. Specifically, it should not be expected that the environmental and consumer groups would halt their campaigns, nor that the industry would halt their process of relocating sites or establishing new fish farms. It would be unrealistic to expect a moratorium in either case.

However, it should be understood by everyone that the environmental groups involved in aquaculture issues are especially taking a leap of faith by cooperating in the Salmon Aquaculture Forum. From their perspective, the Forum should be a means to carry on the dialogue and lead to tangible action by everyone that would not otherwise have occurred.

## 8. Next Steps

This briefing note and *The Salmon Aquaculture Forum: Discussion Paper on Findings and Practices* are provided as information and advice for your consideration. We strongly suggest that, whatever your responses might be, you should proceed soon. The initial meeting of the Forum could be used to determine a list of issues to be considered and establish the work schedule. There is a high-level of expectation that the Salmon Aquaculture Forum should become operational in early 2004, or the rancor, bitterness and intransigence that have characterized the public debate should be expected to resume.



590 – 800 Burrard Street

Vancouver, British Columbia

Canada V6Z 2G7

Telephone: (604) 775 – 5621

Facsimile: (604) 775 – 5622

E-mail: [info@fish.bc.ca](mailto:info@fish.bc.ca)

[www.fish.bc.ca](http://www.fish.bc.ca)