

269 of 657 DOCUMENTS

The Globe and Mail (Canada)

June 24, 2008 Tuesday

First nations join pool of fisheries petitioners; Auditor-General should be asked for wider look at DFO's actions, not just its approval of gravel mine on Fraser River, chief says

BYLINE: MARK HUME

SECTION: BRITISH COLUMBIA NEWS; ENVIRONMENT; Pg. S3

LENGTH: 793 words

DATELINE: VANCOUVER

First nations in British Columbia have added their voice to a call for the Auditor-General of Canada to investigate the actions of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on the West Coast.

But Grand Chief Doug Kelly, interim chair of the B.C. First Nations Fisheries Council, says he wants Auditor-General Sheila Fraser to go farther than she was asked to in a petition filed by several conservation groups.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation, Fraser Valley Salmon Society, Sportfishing Defence Alliance and others recently complained to Ms. Fraser, asking her to examine how the DFO came to approve a gravel mine that they allege will damage salmon habitat on the Fraser River.

"I agree with the call ... for the Auditor-General to review DFO and the policy they used to authorize the removal of gravel from the Fraser River," Mr. Kelly said.

"But I thought that was a bit too narrow ... focusing simply on gravel removal isn't going to solve anything."

Mr. Kelly, who is also on the political executive of the First Nations Summit, said Ms. Fraser needs to look into the broader issue of how the department applies policies that seem to be in direct conflict with its mandate.

He said DFO is supposed to protect wild salmon, but to further the government's interest in promoting economic development, it has begun pursuing initiatives that allow fish habitat to be destroyed.

"The Fisheries Minister is ultimately responsible for conserving and protecting fish and ocean resources for future generations," Mr. Kelly said. "How is it that DFO is put in a situation where it often ends up approving developments that either seriously alter ... or in the worst-case scenario, destroy forever, fish habitat? I think an independent parliamentary official like the Auditor-General should be asked to look at that kind of contradiction."

He gave as an example a decision by the federal government to reclassify 16 lakes across Canada as "tailings impoundment areas," which allows mines to dump toxic waste into fish-bearing waters.

Under the Fisheries Act, it is illegal to put harmful substances into fish-bearing waters, but DFO has not challenged the

First nations join pool of fisheries petitioners; Auditor-General should be asked for wider look at DFO's actions, not just its approval of gravel mine on Fraser River, chief says The Globe and Mail (Canada) June 24, 2008 Tuesday

decision to reclassify the lakes.

Mr. Kelly said the department is also promoting salmon aquaculture on the West Coast, despite concerns that fish farms pose a hazard to wild stocks.

"I think the general consensus is that aquaculture is causing problems. It's causing problems with sea lice; it's causing problems in terms of contamination of ocean beds. It's causing problems in terms of foreign species escaping from net pens and mingling with wild, natural stocks.

"Yet here we have a department that's ultimately responsible, by legislation, for protecting wild salmon stocks, promoting an industry that's harming wild salmon stocks."

Mr. Kelly said he also would like Ms. Fraser to examine DFO's no-net-loss policy, which requires developers, whenever their activities degrade existing fisheries habitat, to compensate by creating new fisheries habitat.

"The government has often used economics to rationalize wiping out or eradicating a particular species, or wiping out habitat for a species. They rationalize it with this thing called no net loss," he said.

"In other words they are arrogant enough to think that man is able and capable of making a decision on wiping out habitat, God's creation, and replacing it with some man-made habitat. And I don't think it's possible.

"That's one of the policies I'd like the Auditor-General to look at, that goofy policy called no net loss. That policy benefits industry and hurts salmon and other ocean life. The Auditor-General should look at that inherent contradiction and provide some advice and direction to the government on how to better manage its objectives, because right now they are in conflict."

The petition by the B.C. organizations followed an earlier petition filed by several prominent individuals - including broadcaster and author David Suzuki, and **Daniel Pauly**, a leading fisheries scientist - that called on the Auditor-General to examine DFO's policy decisions on the West Coast.

Ms. Fraser has not yet indicated whether her department will initiate an investigation. But the issue is expected to get serious consideration given the growing number of people calling for action, and with the Fraser experiencing its worst salmon run in 50 years.

Hannah Mahoney, a DFO spokesperson, said yesterday that ministry officials want to consider the issue more completely before responding.

"At this point we are just going to hold back on comment on this because we've really not had time to review and consider the petition. I think it would be inappropriate to comment until we have had time to review it more thoroughly," she said.

LOAD-DATE: June 24, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper