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20.4.03
E.E. Bruce*

W.A.F. April 20th., 1903

REPORT

OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SALMON COMMISSION.

To The Honourable
Raymond Préfontaine,

Minister of Marine and Fisheries,

Ottawa.

27/1/03

Sir:-

THE Commissioners, after considering most carefully the various phases of the salmon fishery in British Columbia, especially in connection with the serious crisis that has arisen owing to the use of trap-nets by the United States' fishermen in the American waters of Puget sound, have the honour to report as follows:

THE Commissioners cannot ignore the fact that the changed conditions in such an industry as the vast salmon industry on the Pacific coast, demand alterations both in the methods of fishing and in the regulations generally. It is clear that the trap-net, - of which three or four hundred are set on the United States' shore, - has introduced a new phase, which did not exist when the present regulations were framed. It is undeniable that a large portion of the salmon schools coming in from the open sea through Fuca Strait and making for the Fraser River, are caught

CHANGED CONDITIONS
IN B.C. Salmon Industry. ||

by the United States' trawls. It is alleged that the cost of these fish to the United States canners is considerably less than the cost of the fish, caught by the Canadian fishermen, to the Canadian canners. In view of this, the Commission unanimously recommends that:

I. PURSE SEINES

(1.) THE use of Purse Seines be permitted in British Columbia.

PURSE SEINES.

PURSE seines are movable, and can be so used as to capture the fish wherever they may be moving, so that the Canadian fishermen would be given increased opportunities of taking the Fraser River salmon before they reached the United States limits. Purse seines involve the employment of considerable labour, eight or ten fishermen at least being required to work a net, and it is possible for a number of fishermen to combine together to provide the tug and gear necessary for working purse seines. Expensive methods of fishing, such as trap-nets appear inevitably to give a monopoly of the fishing operations to capitalists and canners of means, thus placing the poorer fishermen at a disadvantage. The use of purse seines will, to some extent at least, meet this difficulty. There are five points in favour of purse seines, - points upon which great stress was laid in the evidence before the Commission:

- (1.) THE salmon will be caught before reaching the United States' nets;
- (2.) THE schools of fish will be broken up and the United States catches lessened;
- (3.) THE British Columbia fishing season will be lengthened by two or three weeks, because the fish

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will be caught earlier, that is, just after entering the Strait of Fuca;

4. WHITE fishermen, rather than Japs and foreigners would be employed;
5. PURSE seine privileges would be available for all parties, and would not be monopolized by capitalists.

THE Commissioners would urge that the Act prohibiting purse seines be amended without delay, so that purse seines, as an experiment, can be granted this summer.

TRAP-NETS.

2. TRAP-NETS

[2] WITH regard to trap-nets, the Commissioners realize that the huge salmon traps used on the United States shores are most effective in taking fish in large quantities and cheaply. Of course many locations on the United States' shores are found to yield poor returns, and there is great variation in the success of trap-nets at different points. It is by no means clear that trap-nets can be successfully operated generally on our British Columbia shores, not only because the fish may not move sufficiently close in-shore to be taken by trap-nets, which run out from below low-water mark; but heavy seas and tides in many places would endanger the safety of these nets, which are extremely costly both in regard to material and fixing up.

IT is impossible to ignore the fact that there is a large body of fishermen who rely upon gill-netting, and who would be wholly unable to take part in trap-netting. These men fish generally in the estuary of the Fraser River and out in the Strait of Georgia, and might be seriously affected by trap-nets, which would intercept the salmon before they

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could reach the Strait of Georgia.

ON the other hand, from a business point of view, it seems reasonable to grant to the British Columbia canners the most efficient and economical methods of fishing, such as are permitted in the adjacent waters; but if trap-nets are favourably considered, there are some details which would require consideration. Thus, it would appear fair that canners, who have vast interests, should be placed on the same footing in regard to the allotment of trap-net locations. Dissatisfaction and endless trouble would arise if any particular fishermen or parties were given the best locations, and other firms with large vested interests, were less favourably treated. It was suggested that the Government might operate trap-nets and supply the salmon at actual cost to the canners, while it was also suggested that the trap-net locations should be put up at auction; but both of these courses are objectionable.

AGAIN, the Commissioners are strongly of opinion that white labour should be employed on such trap-nets, were they allowed, and that Chinese, Japanese and other foreign labour should be discouraged or altogether prohibited, thus in any case, were this done, there would be a demand for white labour, which would go to meet the opposition to trap-nets of the white fishermen.

Legalise white labour
only

3. SUGGESTED LIMITATION

GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITS.

OF PURSE SEINES &
TRAP NETS. (S. of 49th parallel)

[3] IMPORTANT witnesses urged before the Commission that if trap-nets and purse seines were permitted, they should be confined to the waters south of the 49th. parallel. This was very strongly urged in Victoria. The reason urged was that the canners and fishermen in the southern part of British Colum-

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Columbia had directly to face the competition of the United States traps, and were more immediately affected than the canners and fishermen further north.

THE Commissioners fail to see that such a restriction would be fully justifiable, and are of opinion that purse seines should be allowed in all the waters of British Columbia coast, as the industry in the northern portion of British Columbia has really to face American competition just as much as that in the southern part of the Province. If the southern canners desire new methods of fishing to cheapen the cost and meet United States' competition, the northern canners have the same claim to cheapen the methods of obtaining salmon.

THIS recommendation would apply also to trap-nets, if in the opinion of the Minister, these nets should be allowed in our Pacific waters.

BOAT-PULLERS' PERMITS.

4. Boat-pullers' permits

[4] THE Commissioners recommend that the Boat-pullers' permits, at present required by law, be abolished.

THE object of the Permits was a good one. It was found that United States' and other foreign fishermen, being prevented by our regulations from taking out licenses and using a fishing boat in our waters, induced some British subject to take out the license, and they were thus found fishing in our boats under guise of boat-pullers. It was decided ^{that} to prevent this abuse the boat-pullers, as well as the fishermen, should take out a permit or license, granted only to British subjects. This permit was granted at a nominal fee, and indeed was not required in the case of Indians. A good deal of friction, however, and

difficulty

difficulty appears to have arisen from the boat-puller's requirement, and in view of the small advantage resulting, the Commissioners recommend that it should be abolished.

HATCHING OF SALMON.

5. New Salmon Hatcheries
urged.

[5.] THE Commissioners cannot too strongly urge that the Government extend as far as possible the artificial hatching of salmon and increasing the supply of these valuable fish in the waters north of the Fraser River. At Rivers Inlet, the Naas River, and at three or four other points in northern British Columbia, salmon hatcheries should be erected without delay. These waters are distant from the United States' boundary, and there is not the same danger of United States' fishermen appropriating our fishery resources as is the case in Puget Sound.

IF the Minister decides that two or three new hatcheries should be erected immediately, in time for operation next fall, the Commissioner of Fisheries would be prepared to at once make detailed reports for the guidance of the Minister.

IN conclusion, the Commissioners, while laying before the Minister, the main points which came up for consideration during the course of the Commission, feel that in the case of some of these points, the parties interested in the salmon industry desire that some steps should be taken at once. The United States canners are extending their operations and

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are doing their utmost to injure the British Columbia salmon industry. This year they are making gigantic efforts to immensely increase their pack of fish, which the Minister is aware, almost solely consists in Puget Sound of Fraser River salmon; but the fact remains that there are a great number of influential parties in British Columbia who feel that caution and circumspect action is absolutely necessary. No doubt haste might work serious injury, and very deliberate steps on that account, would appear to be most justifiable.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Smith

Genl Wiley
Murray Morrison

Edward G. Prince,

Chairman of the
Commission.

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Attached to this Report are a number of Memorials and documents received subsequent to the public sittings of the Commission.