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Day 1 Conclusions

* Transcribed

"I am not going to pretend to be able to summarize what we heard today, and particularly this afternoon, because there was lots of good information and I was writing fiendishly as Jody [Holmes] was speaking. But, I am going to touch on a few things that we talked about this morning, because I think they allow us to throw out some questions that you can think about.

We started off the morning with the Johns—Jon O’Riordan and John Fraser—talking about the [BC Salmon Forum Report](#). I can say quite personally—although I am biased because I was involved in the science committee, I had nothing to do with writing the final report—it is a very thought provoking report and anyone involved in British Columbia and our [inaudible] resources here needs to read that report. I don’t think you can fully appreciate the potential scope of that report without really reading it.

What we heard Jon O’Riordan start off with is that we’re trying to look at the bigger picture. The report is not just about aquaculture and I’ve already said that this morning. It is a little ironic that, after five years of research and lots of soul-searching questions, that the provincial government looks like it will be stepping out of that field and it will be left to the federal government. I do know that you should be hearing quite a bit more about that in the very near future. Jon went on and talked about whole systems, about the application of ecosystem-based management. Jon has written quite a nice little document called [Thinking as a Watershed](#). He mentioned that to you this morning. It’s another little PDF and Jon has said that it is available to anybody who would like to get a copy of that as well. He talked about the role of independent oversight and we heard a little bit about that with Jody. In the Skeena, we applied and, for the first time that the federal government allowed it on the west coast, we did have the independent science review panel working on fishery and habitat issues for Pacific salmon. I think that there is an opportunity to establish that and to use it more effectively. Jon made a very important point—the aquaculture debate was certainly ongoing because of lack of information from the farms. It was extremely difficult. Many times, if you got it, you got it with confidentiality associated with it. So that is not really very helpful when you work for government. It is almost better not to have it than to tell people that you can’t give it to them. So the idea that you have to have a shared and open information system, I think, is a critical recommendation.

John Fraser asked one question that I think is at the heart of what we want to talk about here. Who is in charge to look after wild Pacific salmon? It sounds like a simple question, but I think that is probably the central question that we really want to ask ourselves for the future. Who is really looking after wild salmon and their future? He also made a comment that taking on that responsibility means thoughtful decision-making and accountability. I think that with anything that we do in the Skeena, we have to have that as the ultimate goal. We have to have thoughtful people that will consider the effects on people and on fish, as we just heard from Jody (although not fish) and we have to make sure that people are considered in these recommendations and the outcomes.

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It has made me think for the last while about whether we have a sufficient process in B.C. to take on appropriate public input for the major projects. I think we heard a comment this morning about the environmental assessment process and we heard others commenting on how the EA is flawed and so on. There's clearly a concern out there about the current processes in place. One challenge to me really is, is there a better process? Is there a better way to have public input and make decisions that respect the public good and social justice as well?

Geoff [Recknell] then talked more about ecosystem-based management. He came up with a vision, saying that the province is looking at one land-based management regime, which actually sounds pretty good and it was a way to say that you were going to increase effectiveness of the public service delivery and there was need for better coordination of people and resources. If they can achieve that, I think that that's a laudable objective to go for. I think, though, it gets me back to my same question of, how do you make decisions on these bigger questions? Is that really a sufficient response to the forum report? I think you'd probably get quite a mixed response to that. I think people may be hoping that you can get to more open public input in making some of these solutions. I thought Geoff made two really good points near the end of his presentation that I wrote down really quickly, so I hope they are right. He acknowledged that the cumulative effects of projects shouldn't really be treated as a series of isolated events. I think this is the old tragedy of a thousand small cuts or small events. We really do need ways to look at the cumulative effects of what is going on around us. We have lots of examples of these things. You can talk about aquaculture in that vein, you can talk about run-of-the-river power in that vein and so on. We really do need to look at cumulative effects more than we have. He talked about the importance of area-based consultations and I think that this is something we need to keep in mind as we start talking about a model in the Skeena. The acquisition and inclusion of local knowledge will be critical to really having the establishment of a successful process and new models for that type of decision .

Mark Saunders: I won't go through all of his, although there's probably lots we can talk about under wild salmon. Mark had one comment on a slide that I think is particularly pertinent again, that the department is in transition to collaborative monitoring and management, so you have shared responsibilities across four levels of government, stakeholders and NGOs. I think this is really important — that government is not simply going to keep giving the Pacific money under Pacific salmon. I've simply drawn my conclusion on this, I'm telling our foundation that we have to find ways to raise money in BC. The fundamental change we need to make for government is that they can't take it to Ottawa. If we make this money we have to put it back into salmon in BC. It doesn't have to be just salmon, it can be applied to broader use, forestry or for power generation and so on. We need some way to benefit so we keep a fund building in BC, because we have lots to repair and we have lots of questions that we have to answer in the future. So what I'm telling my foundation to think about in terms of our directors is, what are ways that you'll let us expand how we raise money, what can we promote to Ottawa to keep money in BC for restoration and for management? Mark had a really interesting little analogy about his growing up and his childhood. Who takes the first step? Maybe with a group like this and this conference, to establish ourselves as a prototypic group in terms of developing watershed-based management, we'll start from the bottom up analogy. So we want to put together a package that you take forward and that would maybe be the first step on how people start working together.

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Mel [Kotyk] had lots of words and Mel is in a tough spot because that is an enormous area. We obviously did not learn about the importance of scaling up. We started at a very, very large scale and I think we're going to end up scaling down to really find any effective way to build an integrated resource-based management of the marine ecosystems like that. That is a daunting task. It made me think about what really is an appropriate scale that if you went to a more public process people could handle. PNCIMA is a massive undertaking that would involve many, many issues, many major developments, and I wonder about the reality of taking something on at that scale. It also drew to my mind the question of where does the ocean regime start and stop compared to the fresh water regime? Or the estuaries that we really haven't paid huge attention to, the end of the fresh water regime or are they at the start of the marine? It may sound semantic, but it has quite a bit to do with who has regulatory control over these estuaries. I just finished a public consultation process around the Strait of Georgia and estuary restoration, and recovery of eelgrass in kelp beds is probably one of the biggest things on people's minds in the Strait of Georgia. So, estuaries are really coming back into people's thinking about the future for salmon production. I guess the other thing that came to mind with Mel's is that once you get these long term programs in place they're going to be large scope, they're going to be major questions in people's minds and how do we really protect long term investments that you establish? How do you actually make something sustainable like that, because it's going to have a huge area, there is going to be lots of turnover of people and questions, all sorts of new issues. It drew my mind again to whether or not something in that scale really is workable. So, I think Mel has got some serious challenges on his plate.

The lesson for the Skeena to me is, is the Skeena an appropriate size in terms of developing watershed management? I actually think it is pretty close to an ideal size, because it's not a Fraser, it's certainly large. It does have well-defined sub-basins that groups are closely aligned with, so I think you could probably make the Skeena actually work. That would be something that we would want to talk about more tomorrow.

That is all I had time to really throw together sitting here over coffee and I'll put more thoughts together tonight. So, I don't want to do anybody any injustices by saying silly things too quickly. Maybe we will finish the afternoon with just any sort of questions or comments or something you want to throw out that people can think about for tomorrow. Other than that we can be dismissed. If there's no comments or questions, thank you very much for your patience. Thank you to all speakers, wonderful job today. We'll see you this evening. "