

Announcement of the Pacific Salmon Forum
Premier Gordon Campbell
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The commercial fishery in British Columbia has been part of our province, certainly, since Europeans came. But actually, if you go back generation after generation, First Nations have made the fishery an important part of the life and culture along this coast for thousands of years. One of our critical goals and objectives in the present is to ensure that we have a long-term wild salmon fishery that supports not just our social infrastructure but our economic infrastructure as well.

Fisheries and aquaculture in British Columbia today generate \$1.9 billion in revenues each year from Victoria to Prince Rupert and all points in between. It provides for 20,000 jobs for British Columbians up and down our coast.

Aquaculture, including shellfish, is now the largest agri-food industry in British Columbia. Salmon, both wild and farmed, account for 44 percent of B.C.'s food exports.

And, of course, salmon is a critical part of B.C.'s complex ecosystems, from rivers like the Fraser, Skeena and Cowichan and countless others to the rich waters of our a coastline four times the length of the Canada-U.S. border. But our wild salmon stocks continue to face a variety of pressures - pressures we don't yet entirely understand, but which we must strive to comprehend as we assure a long-term salmon future for British Columbia.

Public debate continues in the province over how best to manage our salmon stocks and our salmon aquaculture. We will continue to work with Ottawa and with the DFO to enhance fisheries management. I was in Ottawa a week ago and talking to the Minister of Fisheries, encouraging them to allocate more resources to British Columbia and to work with us.

But one thing is clear: it's time to create an independent, open opportunity for British Columbians to participate in discussing the salmon fishery for the long term – one that looks at ways we can improve our management of that fishery over the long term in British Columbia. To that end, today I am pleased to announce that we will establish a new Pacific Salmon Forum.

I am also pleased that former federal Fisheries Minister John Fraser has agreed to chair that forum. Mr. Fraser brings a wealth of expertise and understanding, and a well-recognized reputation for independence to his role as chair of the Pacific Salmon Forum. He will be joined by six community, fishery and first nations representatives who have agreed to sit on the first Pacific Salmon Forum board.

The forum will be based in Nanaimo, it will receive \$5 million in provincial funding, and it will be completely independent of the province. The forum will provide recommendations and options with a goal to meeting three objectives: protect and enhance the viability of wild salmon stocks and their economic, social and environmental benefits to British Columbians; increase public confidence in fisheries management generally, and in aquaculture in particular, in the marine environment; and enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of aquaculture for all coastal communities.

The forum, will decide what priority issues they believe need to be addressed, what research is needed and how best to pursue that vision, and their vision will be reinforced by the activities of all British Columbians. We all want to see healthy wild salmon stocks thriving in B.C. waters for generations to come.

The forum will lay out its own workplan. The resources that are provided will allow the forum to report annually. It will be reporting to the public, and at the same time they report to the public, they will launch their report with a standing committee of the Legislature.

I look forward to the results of the forum's work. I invite British Columbians to participate actively and openly with them as we strive to build an even stronger fishery, and an even stronger and better understanding of how our fishery can be maintained for the long term.

I want to say thank you to those members of the public for their contributions in the past and for the contributions that I know they will make to the future. I look forward to learning of the forum's work. I look forward to them sharing their ideas. I look forward to an open, straightforward, scientific as well as social debate, and I believe that by working together, we will create the kind of future for B.C. salmon that is critically important to all of us. Thank you very much.