



Southern Resident Killer Whale potential measures 2023

DFO Response Statement prepared by The Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce

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The Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce, the Vancouver Island Chamber Alliance and the BC Chamber of Commerce's have consistently and continuously stated that they support the protection of the Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). It has also been stated there has to be meaningful consultation between our coastal communities and the DFO to ensure that any proposed or contemplated measures are undertaken in a timely manner and are based on shared science which safeguards the survival of both the species and our coastal communities.

DFO's annual and untimely review process results in uncertainty, instability, and anxiety for each of the small coastal communities that depend on predictable fishing related tourism. DFO's implementation of an annual process that does not seem to bring any new or relevant information yet proposes additional restrictions undermines the social, cultural, and economic fabric of our communities which are reliant on the recreational fishery for their wellbeing. Entire communities like Port Renfrew, and other areas that have already been severely restricted or had fishing closures imposed, continue to suffer the compounding effects of stacking layers of unproven fishery management measures.

The 2023, proposals ignore the fact that the SRKW population is currently stable, and that prey availability has been proven not to be the issue it was once thought to be. Both U.S. and Canadian studies confirm an abundance of Chinook salmon during the period of time that the SRKW are present in our waters. The Studies have determined that there are between 11 and 22 times the amount necessary to satisfy the nutritional requirements of the whales. In fact, The United States has not imposed any fishing closures for recreational fisherman because of concerns over SRKW's lack of Chinook.

The flawed process that is now unfolding annually regardless of the quality, applicability, or quantity of new information available, has unfortunately included announcement of another potentially biased survey. This survey, like the one released in 2018, is leading and offers participants only a choice of support rather than options to object or raise concerns. The inclusion of an approach to establish mobile avoidance zones or an "avoidance bubble" strategy is nowhere to be found.

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These proposed closures for 2023, will have a profound negative impact on the socio-economic stability of the Port Renfrew community. Our service providers [charter fisherman] and primary fisherman [fishing for sustenance] would lose their opportunity to salmon fish. This also impacts campgrounds, accommodations, restaurants, and other retail service providers. The response from Neil Davis [DFO chair, DFO upper management] and Kendra Moore [DFO mammal manager] was, "something has to be done in the Nitinat area", yet any supporting data has not until very recently been shared. The data in our view is unreliable, as it has not solicited the knowledge of our Guides and recreational fishers in a proactive, joint, transparent, and meaningful manner. The Guides and recreational fishers have not been jointly involved and as such now must be reactive, and hope that DFO listens to them.

The proposed measures, if implemented, will be the final knockout blow as they directly affect the only remaining areas where our operator's fish for Chinook salmon. Area 21 is the only opportunity for these operators to sustain their business in the early season.

Area 20-1 represents the only area to get out to deep water and have an opportunity to fish coho, pinks and sockeye so last year's option is important and needed.

Since 2018, we have been requesting DFO utilize data from the operators of whom spend the majority of their time on the ocean, yet this request continues to be ignored. This insanity must stop. The collective stress on our coastal communities is overwhelming. DFO continues to not share their data and then suddenly presents all the stakeholders with options and then asks for consultation with unrealistic timelines. Once the consultation is in, DFO waits to post the measures until the latest possible date. Our businesses, operators, and public fishers cannot continue to be held to these unrealistic proposals and timelines. At this point in time, we have already put in our 2023, business plans in play (moorage, guest and accommodation bookings, bait, mechanical repairs, and new equipment purchases, etc. We should be discussing and consulting on 2024 data and options not 2023, so we can have time to prepare. This matter has been discussed internally with our Chamber Directors and we are looking at two possible pathways moving forward.

The Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce supports the collaborative efforts to synchronize the US and Canadian strategies by implementing a 400 m exclusion zone (with sonar off) whenever Orcas are present. Implementation of mobile avoidance zones supersedes the use of static closures. Mobile avoidance zones allow SRKW foraging to take place and also allow our businesses to continue to exist.

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DFO at present is not engaging with us in an open honest, professional, and timely manner. We require meaningful honest and transparent conversations as these restrictions and closures have a major impact on our lives. DFO is required to use science as the Prime Minister states in his mandate to the Fishery Minister. If this is Minister Murray's mandate, then she should direct DFO to share the raw data that supports these decisions rather than presenting pretty coloured illustrations in their proposals. If DFO decides not to share real and Jointly developed data with the Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce then we must move forward with the assistance of our Sister Chambers, and other stakeholders and organizations and consider acting on the following:

1. File an injunction to cease all restrictions and closures until DFO shares the data supporting its proposals and allows for maintaining the status quo stability while we jointly developed data we can measure over several years.
2. File a class action suit against the DFO for pain and suffering caused by the DFO due to the lack of a meaningful consultation process in a timely manner.

Port Renfrew and the coastal communities prefer to have harmonious working relations with DFO but it seems to us we are being forced into an "us and them" scenario which we find unhealthy for all. Please advise us if you wish to continue further dialogue to create a collaborative and harmonious approach to this matter.

The Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce supports the protection and preservation of the SRKW and other endangered species. We are supportive of doing what it takes to ensure the preservation of the species and our endangered communities.

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