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Executive Lead

Responsable exécutif

Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative

Initiative de Stratégie du Saumon du Pacifique

July 22, 2025

Mr. Bill Campbell
President
South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition
< bill@anglerscoalition.com >

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Thank you for your correspondence of March 14, 2025, addressed to the Honourable Joanne Thompson, Minister of Fisheries, regarding the Sooke Chinook Enhancement Initiative/Orca Food Security Program. I have been asked to respond on the Minister's behalf, and I regret the delay in responding.

DFO is currently working to gather the information requested by the Southern Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition (SVIAC) —including items raised at the spring 2025 Victoria Sport Fishing Advisory Committee (SFAC) meeting —and to address the concerns included in your correspondence. Once all the information has been compiled, the Department will organize a meeting date and discuss options for the SVIAC to continue supporting salmon enhancement efforts in the Sooke area.

I appreciate the time you have taken to share your concerns regarding the Nitinat Hatchery. As you noted, in November 2024, DFO notified Mr. Chris Bos that the Nitinat Hatchery would be unable to provide juveniles to the Sooke seapen project in spring 2025. Given the timelines associated with hatchery broodstock collection, the Department, to the best of their ability, notified SVIAC as soon as this became apparent to hatchery staff.

The inability of Nitinat Hatchery to conduct the planned transfer of Chinook juveniles to the Sooke seapen was a result of hatchery egg targets not being met—for both the Sooke net pen project and the natal Nitinat program. This shortfall was not due to low Chinook abundance, but rather to a larger and earlier-than-expected Nitinat Chum return, which made continued Chinook broodstock collection efforts very difficult.

I also appreciate your concerns regarding DFO's recommendation to discontinue the Sooke seapen project in 2026 for brood year 2025 Chinook. I want to assure you that this decision was not made lightly. The recommendation was based on a project performance evaluation, which forms part of DFO's annual production planning and assessment frameworks.

This evaluation assessed the program's efficacy. Based on an analysis of coded wire tag data covering the last five years, the program was estimated to contribute less than 1 percent to

local area fisheries (Pacific Fisheries Management Area 20). I have attached a copy of the results for your information (Appendix 1).

With an increased focus on prioritizing work, and given the annual effort and cost of the project—approximately \$90,000—it was determined that the program was not fulfilling several required outcomes, and unfortunately, could not continue.

I understand that the recommendation to cease the Sooke seapen program was communicated within the engagement and consultation process, and that the timelines were outlined in the annual Integrated Fisheries Management Plan consultation process. In addition, local area SFAC members were provided a written summary of the recommendation on February 3, 2025, prior to the scheduled SFAC engagement meeting, held in Victoria on February 26, 2025. The recommendations were then again reviewed at the Integrated Harvesters Planning Committee consultation meeting on March 11, 2025. I recognize that we could have improved the engagement and communication of program change to you directly.

I also recognize the effort that SVIAC has dedicated to advancing and supporting this project, and realize that discontinuing the seapen project is a difficult transition. I understand that departmental staff will be meeting with you in the near future to further discuss your concerns. If you would like to discuss this matter further prior to this meeting, please contact Ms. Brigid Payne, Director, Salmonid Enhancement, by email at < Brigid.Payne@dfo-mpo.gc.ca >.

Thank you again for writing. The Department and I are grateful for your work and hope that you will continue to contribute to future enhancement planning in your area through the local advisory process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Chambers.", is centered on the page.

Susan Chambers
Executive Lead
Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative