



SEP 18 2017

Mr. Alistair MacGregor , M.P.
Cowichan – Malahat – Langford
< Alistair.MacGregor@parl.gc.ca >

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for your correspondence of August 1, 2017, regarding water levels in the Cowichan River.

I note your concerns about the impact of the low water flows on fish populations in the Cowichan River, which is one of Vancouver Island's most important salmon streams. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is one of many partners working on solutions to effectively manage the storage of water in Cowichan Lake and the water flows in the Cowichan River. The Department continues to support the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders to develop solutions to improve Cowichan River flows.

DFO agrees that a longer-term solution is needed for the water flow issues in the Cowichan and that this may involve raising the weir at Lake Cowichan to store more water. While DFO is not currently considering applying for a water licence to facilitate additional water storage in the lake, the Department remains committed to working with Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst Paper, local governments and interested parties, such as yourself, on solutions that address all First Nations and stakeholder concerns to ensure the sustainability and continued productivity of the fisheries resource.

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For example, DFO is a member of the Cowichan Watershed Board and carries out ongoing projects to monitor the river flow and temperature within the Cowichan River. These projects are in partnership with the Cowichan Tribes, Catalyst Paper and the Government of British Columbia.

The Department also: supports and funds the Cowichan Harvest Roundtables in partnership with the Government of British Columbia and the Cowichan Tribes; considers advice and concerns from recreational and commercial fisheries' associations; and consults one-on-one with members of the Cowichan Tribes. The Department also takes specific actions to limit or prohibit fisheries on the Cowichan River during times of drought or extreme temperatures as a way to mitigate the stress on important salmon populations.

Thank you for writing. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. LeBlanc', written in a cursive style.

Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., Q.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

c.c.: Ms. Sonia Furstenuau, M.L.A.
Cowichan Valley



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Alistair MacGregor

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August 1st, 2017

The Honourable Dominic Leblanc
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Leblanc,

RE: Response to Petition No. 421-01244

I am writing in regard to the need for strong federal leadership in funding the raising of the Cowichan River Weir. The Cowichan River, which is critical to the Cowichan Region's watershed, has been seriously impacted by the effects of climate change and requires a long-term adaptation plan.

Over the past number of years, due to unprecedented dry springs and summers with no rain and snow pack, the water flows in the Cowichan River have reached such low levels that they are having detrimental effects for fish, which include trout, young Steelhead, fry Coho and adult Chinook salmon. Although this year has been blessed with a strong snow pack and adequate lake level, it stands out as an anomaly in contrast to long-term trends.

The Cowichan River has great cultural and spiritual value for Cowichan Tribes people; it is a popular local and tourist destination for water activities, and it provides drinking water for the town of Crofton which recently had to be placed under a boil order advisory due to possible unsafe drinking conditions. The river is one of only three designated Canadian Heritage Rivers in British Columbia.

The low water flow has also repeatedly threatened to shut down the Catalyst paper mill which would impact hundreds of jobs and threaten economic well-being in the community.

The Liberal government has promised to protect our communities from the challenges of climate change and grow the economy by making significant investments in green infrastructure. The communities and fish habitat that depend on the Cowichan River can wait no longer for this promise to be fulfilled.

Under section 20 of the *Fisheries Act*, you have the power to act and do what is deemed necessary to maintain the flow of water that is sufficient to permit the free passage of fish.

MINISTRE
Received
AUG 11 2017
BUREAU DU MINISTRE - MPO
Reçu

CABINET DU MINISTRE
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER
2017-08-11
Received by MCCU
Reçu par UCCM

There have been hundreds of names submitted to the House of Commons, petitioning the government asking for funding for this project so that the community can finally ensure water quality, prosperous fish habitat and a thriving industry. These names were submitted in **Petition No. 421-01244**. Your Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Terry Beech, responded that the Government of Canada has “acknowledged that summer low flows in the Cowichan River are a threat to fish and fish habitat and raising the Cowichan Weir could provide additional water storage in Cowichan Lake to provide sufficient flows to support fish and fish habitat in the Cowichan River during the dry period of the year.” Furthermore, the response indicated that “the Government of Canada is prepared to participate in future discussions to further examine the possibility of funding mechanisms.”

I am asking for your government’s promises of mitigating the devastating effects of climate change to be kept by taking a leadership role in working with provincial and municipal governments, regional districts and indigenous communities to protect fish and fish habitat. This can be accomplished by providing direct funding for raising the Cowichan River weir to ensure sustainable water flow that is sufficient to protect fish and fish habitat and to sustain the cultural, ecological, municipal and industrial requirements of affected communities.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Alistair MacGregor

Member of Parliament for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford

Cc:

Chief William Seymour, Cowichan Tribes
Sonia Furstenau, MLA for Cowichan Valley
Jon Lefebure, Chair for Cowichan Valley Regional District
Graham Kissack, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility for Catalyst Paper Corporation

AM/ts