

UFAWU-Unifor

UPDATE

A REPORT TO GOVERNMENTS ON THE 2019 SALMON SEASON –

The 2019 salmon season has been devastating for BC’s fishermen, ancillary workers and processing companies. In 2019, the total number of salmon commercially harvested in BC was 629,000 salmon or 3,583,000 pounds, the lowest catch in 70 years. The value was 15 million dollars, the lowest landed value paid to fishermen since 1951.

From their earnings, fishermen have to first pay their pre-season expenses of DFO licence fees, insurance, moorage, gear storage, and prep for their boats and engines. Fishermen also have up-front fishing expenses (fuel, grub, inseason repairs to their boats and gear) that they must pay during the season. When expenses are deducted, there is not much left to take home to feed their families and none left to look after their boats over the winter.

Shoreworkers, and others who are dependent on salmon for work, saw little this summer. A plant can process well over 3 million pounds in a season so the 2019 harvest of 3.5 million pounds was spread thin between BC’s many processing plants – resulting in little or no work for plant workers. Most of the salmon in our local markets have been sourced from northern Alaska or Russia, which have had a banner year, unlike BC and southern Alaska.

The commercial salmon fishery was the lowest since 1951 measured in both pounds and value.

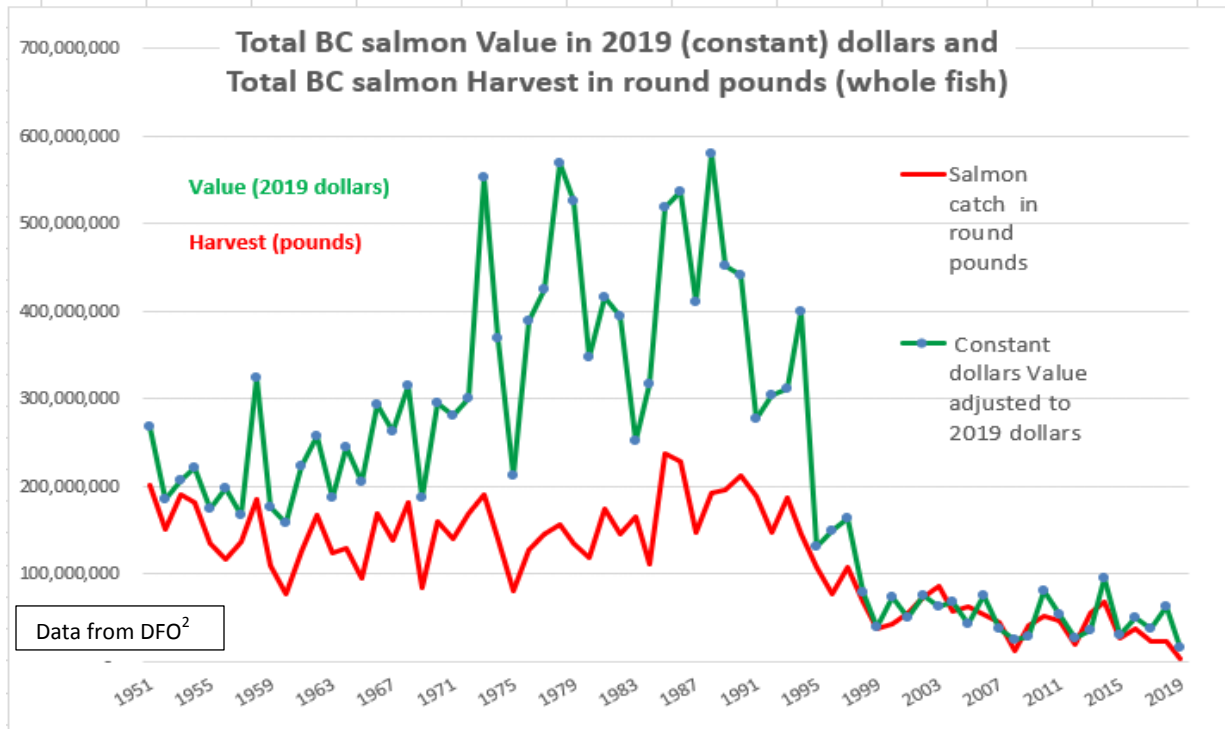


Chart 1

The 2019 harvest (pounds) is the smallest since 1951. The value (\$2019) is the lowest since 1951.

The commercial fishery cannot support itself on the low level of catches and values seen in the last two decades. As shown on page 3 of this report, the low harvests from 1999 to 2018 reflected DFO policy decisions to reduce commercial catches. Until 2019, poor harvests were not due to poor run sizes – or overfishing. The 2019 disaster was the first year of a complete BC run failure.

Comparison: Where is 2019 compared to the 10 lowest years (in pounds and value) since 1951 ?

Table 1

Pounds	
Year	Salmon round LBS
2019	3,583,034
2008	11,885,123
2012	19,918,769
2017	21,997,728
2018	23,144,132
2015	26,578,935
1999	37,791,647
2016	37,981,245
2009	40,803,162
2000	42,981,330

Table 1 – **Harvest - pounds of salmon** –
These are the 10 lowest years since 1951.
 2019 is the lowest year – in terms of the number of pounds of salmon caught since 1951

Table 2 – **Value adjusted to 2019 dollars** -
 2019 is the lowest value out of the 10 lowest years - in terms of value paid to fishermen since 1951.

2019 is the lowest year since 1951 whether measured in pounds or in value.

Table 2

Value	
Year	adjusted to 2019 dollars
2019	15,230,249
2008	25,365,806
2012	26,657,075
2009	27,615,895
2015	29,805,252
2013	35,927,982
2017	37,642,665
2007	37,856,434
1999	38,314,416
2005	43,298,747

Harvest:

The number of **salmon caught** in 2019 **as a percentage** of the averaged catch of the past 10 years.

Fishing gear by Area	Number Salmon Caught		%
	10 yr Ave 2009-18 All Salmon	2019 All Salmon	2019 of Ave 2009-18
SEINE Salmon Area A (north)	2,952,930	121,363	4%
SEINE Salmon Area B (south)	2,884,567	9,312	0%
SEINE Total	5,837,496	130,675	2%
GILL NET Salmon Area C (north)	638,853	137,541	22%
GILL NET Salmon Area D (south)	582,813	52,774	9%
GILL NET Salmon Area E (Fraser)	640,475	-	0%
GILL NET Total	1,862,141	190,315	10%
TROLL Salmon Area F (north)	398,691	284,752	71%
TROLL Salmon Area G (south)	73,553	23,238	32%
TROLL Salmon Area H (Gulf)	134,266	-	0%
TROLL Total	606,510	307,990	51%
Grand Total	8,306,148	628,980	8%

Table 3

Area A (north coast) seines caught only 4% of their average catch and Area B (south coast) seines caught zero. In 2019, seiners caught 2% of their 10 year averaged catch – a 98% drop in harvest.

Area C Gillnets (northern) harvested 22% of their average and Area D (southern) harvested 9%. Fraser River gillnetters had no fishing opportunities. Overall, the gillnet catch was down by 90%.

Area F (northern) troll did better. They caught 71% of their average harvest – still, almost 30% less than average. Area G troll (West Coast Vancouver Island- WCVI) caught only 32% of their 10 year average and Area H (Fraser/Gulf) did not go fishing.

In total, salmon fishermen only caught 8% of their 10 year average harvests. And, as can be seen in Chart 1 on Page 1 above, the last 10 years saw the smallest harvests in any decade since 1951.

Value – Income - Earnings When the harvest is down so are people’s earnings.

	Value of catch		% Value
	Ave 2009-18	2019	2019 of Ave 2009-18
All Species			
Seine	19,585,200	1,171,191	6%
Gillnet	13,620,480	3,137,802	23%
Troll	12,488,500	10,921,257	87%
Total	45,047,915	15,230,249	34%

The value of the seine harvest was 6% of the average of the most recent 10 years.

Gillnets made 23% of their 10 year average earnings

The troll fleet made 87% of their 10 year average.

All in all, fishermen made only 34% of the average value of the most recent 10 years. And the most recent decade has seen poor earnings compared to other decades. (Chart 1 page 1)

Table 4

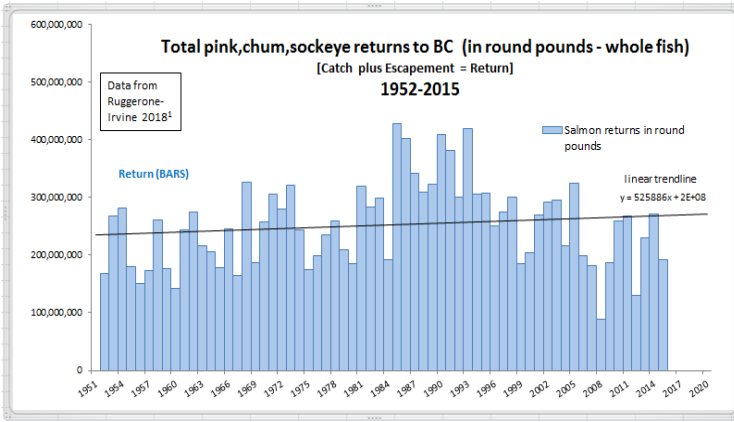


Chart 2

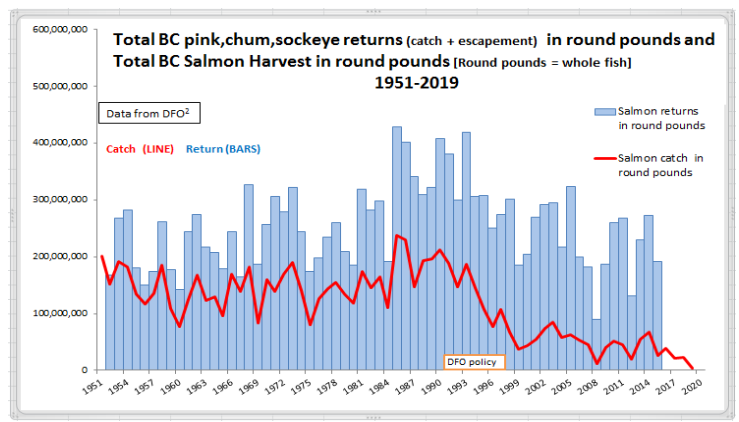


Chart 3

The chart on the left (Chart 2) shows total BC pink, chum and sockeye returns (catch plus escapement) in round pounds from 1952-2015. This data is from Ruggeronne and Irvine 2018¹ which is the best total return data publicly accessible. It does not include coho or chinook returns, which means the poundage shown on the chart is smaller if the return data was available for all 5 salmon species. Aggregate salmon returns are not available for 2016-2019. The (pre-2015) linear trendline shows an increasing Return trend over time.

The red line on the chart on the right (Chart 3) shows the the commercial harvest of all 5 salmon species (pink, chum, sockeye and coho and chinook). Total returns (blue bars) remained relatively stable from 1952-2015 compared to harvests which declined dramatically beginning in 1995.

The steep drop in catch from 1995-1998 was due to DFO policy decisions and not because of a decline in salmon returns - which remained at stable levels (see trendline in Chart 2). **There was a 72% drop in harvests from the 20 years pre-1995 to the 20 years post-1999. (1975-1994 average annual catch was 162 million pounds; 1999-2018 average annual catch declined to 46 million pounds)**

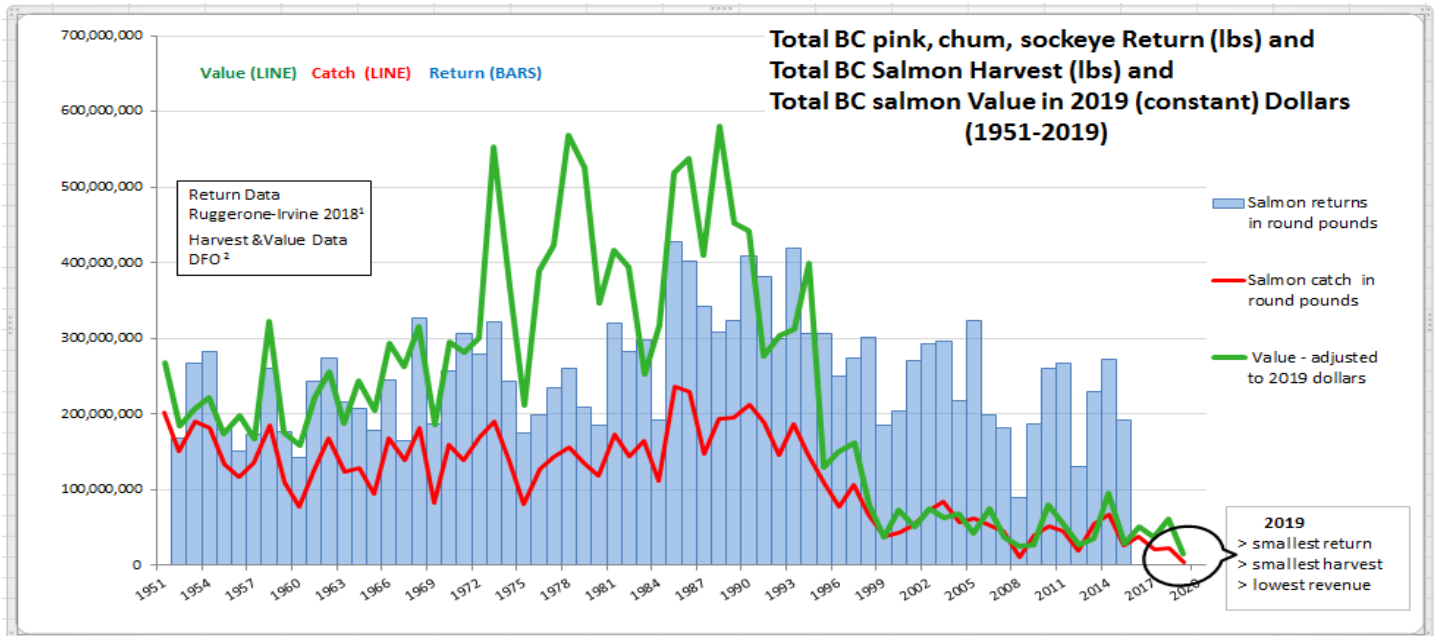


Chart 4 As the harvest declined, fishermen’s income declined even more dramatically. The additional green line is the landed value paid to fishermen for their catch. The UFAWU bargained for salmon minimum prices from 1945-1993.

In the 20 years 1975-1994, the average annual value of the salmon harvest was \$404 million. In the 20 years 1999-2018, the average annual value dropped by 87% to \$52 million. .

After 20 years of low harvests and income driven by DFO policy choices, by 2018 the fleet was in a poor financial position, unresilient and unable to withstand the impacts of huge drop in 2019 BC coast-wide salmon returns.

Fishermen, shoreworkers and tendermen in BC need financial assistance to help them through this tough period. Atlantic fishers (Ice Emergency Assistance Program), farmers and others receive emergency relief. There has been no reply to our many letters seeking disaster assistance and requests to develop future climate change plans.

Climate change and its various impacts on salmon have created a crisis; salmon did not return to BC from the North Pacific where they over-winter. Who knows if this pattern of low salmon returns will continue? But until there is a climate change adaptation plan for commercial fishing people and fish processors, government needs to ante-up and give fishermen and ancillary workers financial support.

Fishermen lost between 30% and 100% of their income, before expenses. Fish processing companies, who have had little salmon to process and therefore no revenue are finding it impossible to make loans to assist fishermen with their vessel costs. Skilled deckhands, shoreworkers, net menders, tendermen and other ancillary workers, unable to make a living will vacate the industry, leaving no one to train future generations. Infrastructure costs, whether they be for boat, gear or processing facilities are ongoing whether there is a large fishery or no fishery at all. Infrastructure cannot be maintained when there are little to no earnings.

The future looks bleak. 2020 is predicted to be as bad as 2019 all across the BC coast. The Big Bar slide will further restrict any possible Fraser fishery as work to create fish passage will likely not be fully completed in 2020 and it will take years to rebuild damaged upper Fraser salmon stocks. Licensing measures prevent fishermen from easily moving into another species fishery and as ocean conditions become less and less favourable for cold water BC fish, other fisheries will also become at risk.

It is time for the Federal and Provincial governments to sit down with fishermen and ancillary workers to discuss the future of BC's fishing industry. What can be done to keep a fishing fleet in viable condition? To attract new entrants? To pass on fishing skills? To meet First Nations aspirations? To assist and engage fishing communities in retaining economic value from our fisheries? What changes need to be made?

So far, DFO and the Minister responsible for Fisheries and, moreover, responsible for the people engaged in the fisheries, are not answering. This Updated Report provides sufficient information to show that BC fishermen and ancillary workers are not 'crying wolf'. All the evidence points to the rapidly approaching end of the commercial salmon fishery in BC and the end of the iconic BC fisherman. It is incumbent on governments to work with the people who rely on the commercial fishery to figure a way out of this crisis.

References:

1. Catch (numbers (pieces) or tonnes) information is all from Department of Fisheries and Ocean's website and can be accessed at: <https://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/species-especes/salmon-saumon/fisheries-peches/stats-donnees-eng.html> and https://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/stats/comm/summ-somm/annsumsommann/2018/ANNUAL18_USER_three_party_groups-eng.htm
2. Ruggerone, Gregorie T. and Irvine, James R. ***Numbers and Biomass of Natural- and Hatchery-Origin Pink Salmon, Chum Salmon, and Sockeye Salmon in the North Pacific Ocean, 1925–2015.*** Marine and Coastal Fisheries. April 4, 2018. [BC salmon return tables]

The full report can be found at The American Fisheries Society site:

<https://afspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mcf2.10023#support-information-section>

Supplementary Tables S13-S15 - 1952-2015 BC biomass data. The supplemental tables can be found at:

<https://afspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/mcf2.10023#support-information-section>

3. Constant dollars adjusted for inflation from 1951 to 2019 kindly provided by Dyhia Belhabib from Ecotrust Canada