

## T'aaq-wiihak Today: A Look at the Five Nations' Rights-Based Fisheries, Post- Justification Trial



**Andy Webster takes a moment to assess one of the suuḥaa he landed. According to Webster, the current state of the T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries prevents him from feeling optimistic about the future.**

Ahousaht fisherman Andy Webster feels “This is the first time in 10 years they’ve given us a little bit of an allocation.” He, along with many other Nuu-chah-nulth fishers, continues to feel frustrated about the slow progress being made by the T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries, but is out on the water fishing as a result of the April 19 BC Supreme Court ruling that upholds the five Nations’ Aboriginal right to fish and sell fish from their territories.

It’s a sunny summer day in Tofino in early July, and T'aaq-wiihak fishers are landing their catch at different times and locations around the city as part of the suuḥaa (Chinook salmon) demonstration fishery; some

land at Lions Gate Fisheries Ltd., and others at the 4th Street Dock. The fishers arrive in their mosquito vessels, but also in their trollers, which is good news.

On June 27, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) informed the T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries that the 25-foot vessel size restriction the department had placed on fishing activity (via the April 19 ‘justification trial’ ruling) was being lifted, meaning fishers could hit the water in their trollers.

“The leads worked relentlessly on negotiation, directing me to push back on the issue of fleet separation. It worked,” said Saul Milne, T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries Manager. There are currently a total of 36 registered trollers and 65 registered mosquito vessels in the T'aaq-wiihak fleet. Of those boats, 19 trollers and 17 mosquito vessels have actively participated in the 2018 fishery so far.

The T'aaq-wiihak fishing process goes something like this: prior to heading out in their vessels, fishers indicate their intent to fish by contacting the designated ‘hail out’ line that is managed by Dani Francis, T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries Technician. Dani ensures there will be catch monitors available to process the landings, and is responsible for communicating back and forth with all parties involved.

Anyone who spends more than twenty minutes with Dani quickly realizes how busy her role keeps her; the sound of incoming text message alerts that surrounds her is relentless. A member of the team since 2014, she is truly integral to the day-to-day functioning of the fisheries.

Back at the 4th Street Dock, Joe David (also known as ‘JD’) has arrived to do some buying. A fisherman himself, JD is working in a different capacity by purchasing fish

on behalf of the Okanagan Nation Alliance. Following the release of the April 19 court case decision that states the recreation sector no longer takes priority over the T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries, the Nations’ share of suuḥaa has increased from 6.29 per cent of the commercial total allowable catch (TAC) to 12.17 per cent of the Canadian west coast Vancouver Island TAC (after the deduction of food, social and ceremonial allocations). This increase is considered a small victory.

It is a small victory because based on the low abundance of suuḥaa this year, the T'aaq-wiihak TAC for 2018 equals 9,721 pieces, to be shared amongst five Nations.

When asked what portion of his income fishing currently comprises, Ahousaht fisherman Edward Smith who is also landing a few suuḥaa at the dock replies, “I’m fishing as a hobby right now, just to get out.” Smith is the owner/operator of the Rocky Pass, a water taxi with service between Tofino, Hesquiaht and Ahousaht. The taxi is his main source of income, which also affords him the opportunity to employ family members.

Smith, like many other T'aaq-wiihak fishers, is trying to foster an interest in fishing as a potential career for his sons, but finds it hard to do so with the current state the fisheries are in. Saul Milne explains that “Access is a key component. If access is not secured, we can’t be creative in planning for the access we have.”

Milne adds that a significant step towards progress would include having the Canadian government follow through with the Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) that the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard promised the Nations would be forthcoming at a meeting in Campbell River in March. The MC is the critical step in Canada approving a new and reasonable negotiating mandate, which would enable T'aaq-wiihak to reach a long-term and fair agreement to exercise the Nations’ rights.



**Access is a key component.**

- Saul Milne, T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries Manager

At the very least, if Fisheries and Oceans Canada can publically demonstrate that they support the MC, and are willing to mirror the promises Minister LeBlanc made and ultimately champion the process, meaningful progress can begin to take shape.

In the meantime, The Nations continue to plan for the future as best they can. T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries contract biologist Candace Picco is exploring new fishery possibilities, and is writing a taa?inwa (sea cucumber) management plan for the first T'aaq-wiihak taa?inwa fishery this fall. In addition to this, she is working with Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation to plan and determine the TAC in their Burman and Conuma River fisheries.

Picco is also working with Milne to develop a multi-species fishery, and this includes collaborating with Ecotrust Canada to develop the monitoring component for potential taa?inwa and crab monitoring opportunities for T'aaq-wiihak catch monitors.



**Shelby Huebner, T'aaq-wiihak Catch Monitor, records fish weights at the 4th Street Dock in Tofino. Huebner is in her second year of monitoring.**