

In recent years, herring stocks have only supported a commercial fishery on the east coast of Vancouver Island. Ha'wiih would like the commercial seine and gillnet roe fishery on the west coast to remain closed for another year.

Nuu-chah-nulth Ha'wiih and their representatives are not taking any chances with west coast herring. That was the message they delivered to Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) at a recent meeting where herring featured on the agenda.

"If the stocks aren't healthy, can we really be thinking about economics?" said Archie Little, speaking on behalf of Nuchatlaht.

Following poor returns in recent years, west coast herring stocks are expected to be large enough in 2014 support commercial harvest according to DFO assessment models. But some Ha'wiih weren't convinced DFO models are reflecting reality.

"Herring are the only species that can fertilize the ocean bed," added Simon Lucas for Hesquiaht. "Everything else depends on herring."

The discussion followed a presentation by the ʔaayaaqa committee, a five-person group ap-

pointed by the Ha'wiih to review information regarding herring stocks. Andy Olson, Marion Campbell, Kevin Mack, Rufus Charleson, and Lyle Billy first met in September to develop recommendations for Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). They presented these recommendations at the Council of Ha'wiih Forum on Fisheries in late November.

The first five recommendations addressed the 2014 herring season. They include limiting economic harvests to a nation's spawn-on-kelp (or spawn-on-bough) licences, along with any potential

fisheries arising from fishing rights negotiations. The committee did not want to see commercial gillnet or seine fisheries from the regular commercial sector.

"They are proposing conservative, low-risk fisheries," says Uu-a-thluk biologist, Jim Lane. "Aboriginal spawn-on bough and spawn-on kelp fisheries have low mortality compared to industrial fisheries. They just take the roe, not the herring."

Allowing the herring to go free leaves them in the ocean to spawn again. However, if DFO managed the fishery according to existing harvest plans, industrial fishers could take up to 4,000 tonnes of herring from an estimated 30,000 tonnes.

"Recently DFO changed the assessment model," says Lane. "One significant change is accounting for spawn that was not measured by the assessment teams. They only found 12,000 tonnes during stock assessments, but they expect somewhere between 11,000-40,000 tonnes."

In addition to the five recommendations for the 2014 fishery, the committee also proposed nine recommendations aimed at changing how herring are managed in Nuuchah-nulth ha-houlthee. This set of recommendations included funding assessment and research through the herring fishery and developing a process that permits participation and access to assessment work for Nuuchah-nulth.

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Ha'wiih and their representatives agreed with the committee's recommendations and presented them during the second day of the meeting to DFO. DFO is now considering these recommendations as they create harvest plans for the 2014 herring season.

For more information or to request a copy of the recommendations, contact Jim Lane, Uu-a-thluk Southern Region biologist (Jim.Lane@nuuchahnulth.org or 250-724-5757).

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DFO currently manages Pacific herring as five major and two minor stock areas. Along with gathering catch and survey information for each of these seven areas, DFO also gathers information from First Nations on herring behavior, spawn timing, abundance, ecosystem relationships, and fishing methods.

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A herring test fishery samples stocks to help assess future harvests.
Photo courtesy of Glenn Lario, DFO

Siihumuu or k'waqmis (herring roe) is an important food for many Nuuchah-nulth families.