

## **Prawn Sectoral Committee**

### **November 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting Summary**

A Prawn Sectoral Committee meeting was held on November 28<sup>th</sup> at the Coast Bastion Inn in Nanaimo. The following is a summary of the meeting. JO Thomas & Associates Ltd. will be producing formal minutes of the meeting.

#### **A) Introductions**

Due to weather conditions (snow) the meeting was not as well attended as in the past. For the most part it was the same representatives as in the past; however, the Cowichan Tribes have now sent a representative to the last two Sectoral meetings so their presence may become a regular occurrence.

#### **B) Monitoring the Ocean**

The Sectoral was provide with presentations of three scientific initiatives for monitoring the ocean.

The first presentation was by researchers from the University of Victoria about a project called VENUS. VENUS is set up in three sites: a location in Saanich Inlet north of Victoria, which went into operation in February of 2006; a location near the [Fraser River Delta](#); and a location in the deeper waters of the [Strait of Georgia](#) that will become operational in 2007.



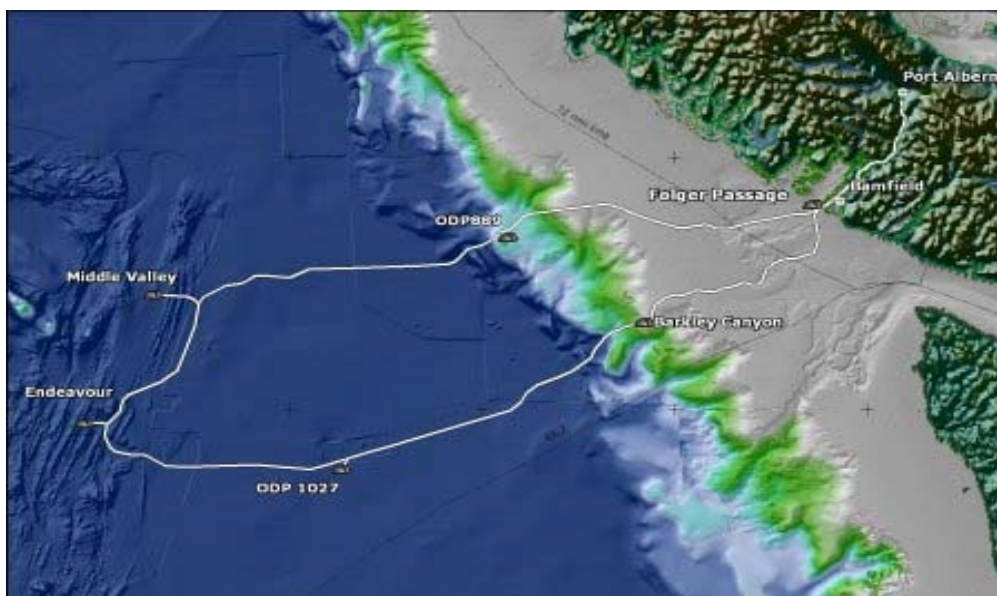
For the VENUS project, the researchers have installed instrument arrays on the seafloor that are cabled to the shore. This will apparently provide long-term oceanographic data on physical, chemical, biological, and sediment conditions. Caucus has been consulted on this project in the past and this presentation was more of an update. It is not thought that this project will affect the commercial prawn fishery. For more information see the VENUS web site at: [www.venus.uvic.ca](http://www.venus.uvic.ca)

The second presentation was again from the University of Victoria, about a project that is similar to VENUS but much larger. This new project is called NEPTUNE and it is being installed on the west coast of Vancouver Island. NEPTUNE will be the world's largest cable-linked seafloor observatory.

For NEPTUNE, cables are being run down Alberni Canal to Bamfield (on top of or beside the cables that are already in place). From Bamfield an 800 km ring of powered fibre optic cable will be laid on the seabed over the northern part of the Juan de Fuca tectonic plate (see map below).

The NEPTUNE cable network will initially feature two seafloor “laboratories”, or nodes, one on the northern edge of Barkley Canyon, the other close to the active venting along the Endeavour Ridge. From these nodes, land-based scientists will control and monitor sampling instruments, video cameras and remotely operated vehicles as they collect data from the ocean surface to under the seafloor. Instruments will be interactive—scientists will instruct them to respond to events such as storms, plankton blooms, fish migrations, earthquakes, tsunamis, and underwater volcanic eruptions, as they happen.

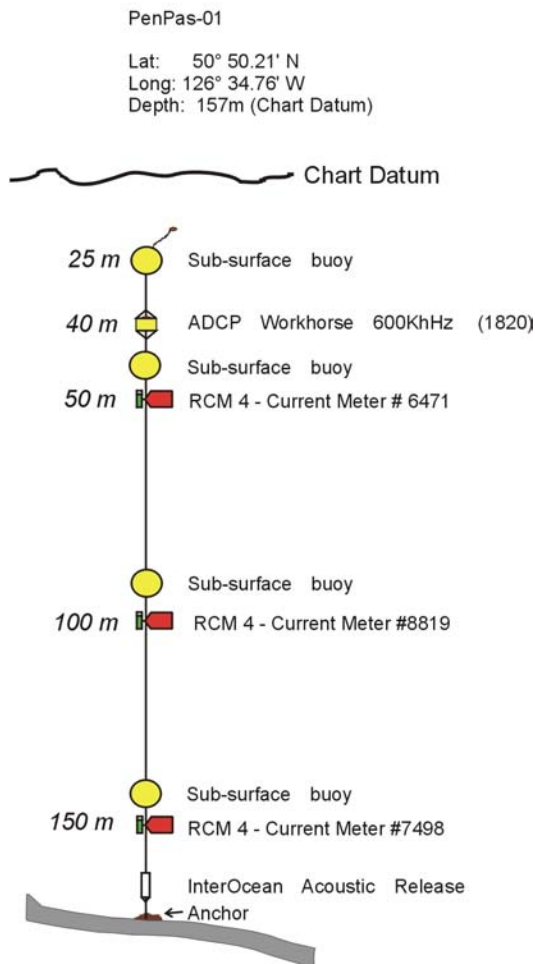
This project is just being started. This was the first time this project had been presented to the Sectoral as part of the consultations. It is not anticipated it will affect the commercial prawn fishery. For more information see the NEPTUNE website at [www.neptunecanada.ca](http://www.neptunecanada.ca)



The third presentation was about a DFO initiative through the Institute of Ocean Sciences (IOS). Unfortunately, the DFO-IOS researchers in charge of the project were unable to get to the meeting so Jim Morrison (DFO Lead Prawn Manager) outlined the project for the Sectoral.

It would appear that DFO-IOS deployed two subsurface current meter moorings in Statistical Area 12; one in Penphraser Passage and one in Sutlej Channel in October of this year. These current meter mooring are 25m below the surface, so they shouldn't affect vessel traffic but it is possible that prawn gear set in the area could get snagged depending on the radius of the moorings.

### Penphraser Passage Current Meter Mooring



The following chart shows the locations of the two subsurface moorings, the lat/log for Penphraser Passage is shown in the previous diagram. The location for the Sutlej Channel mooring is thought to be:

Lat: 50° 52.948' N  
Long: 126° 45.076' W



At the Prawn Sectoral Committee meeting the Industry Caucus commented that it would have been preferable if DFO-IOs had consulted with the industry before deploying these moorings.

### C) First Nations Treaty Update

DFO advised that federal treaty negotiators had been invited to the Sectoral to provide an update. Due to the weather, the federal negotiators were unable to attend and DFO was not provided with any information to pass on to the Sectoral members.

DFO has been repeatedly requesting federal treaty negotiators provide an update of treaty discussions to the Prawn Sectoral Committee. However, treaty negotiators have declined to attend the meetings. It has been some time since the Prawn Sectoral Committee has been given an update and any news about treaties.

### D) WorkSafe (WCB) Update

Pat Olsen, Safety Officer with WorkSafe (formerly WCB), provided an update on the commercial fishing vessel inspection activities WorkSafe is currently conducting.

Pat advised the WorkSafe is focusing on three areas when conducting their inspections; cold water immersion survival, emergency drill requirements and vessel stability. The vessel stability process was outlined as follows:

1. WorkSafe contacts vessel owner and arranges an inspection.
2. WorkSafe conducts the inspection:
  - Meet owner (or owner representative) and vessel master.
  - Review vessel documentation and audit work processes
    - ⇒ information or instruction checklist being used
    - ⇒ downloading prevention
    - ⇒ free surface prevention

- ⇒ accurate technical data (i.e., stability book)
  - ⇒ good seamanship practices
  - ⇒ requirement for written instructions (for stability in varying loads and conditions)
  - ⇒ review Master's stability knowledge
3. Follow up consultation.
  4. Final inspection report issued.
  5. Random follow up inspection

According to WorkSafe, to date 35 commercial fishing vessels have been inspected (one was a prawn vessel). Apparently WorkSafe intends to inspect all commercial fishing vessels by 2016. WorkSafe is prioritizing inspection on what they perceive as an “at-risk” basis, and are currently focusing on trawl and trap vessels, multi-licensed vessels, modified vessels and vessels whose “sister ships” have experienced problems.

#### **E) Transportation Safety Board (Marine)**

Captain Raymond Matthews of the Transportation Safety Board (TSB) discussed vessel stability and how modifications to a vessel can affect stability. The TSB is responsible for investigating accidents and determining the cause. Captain Matthews used the accidents involving the F/V Fritz-Ann and the F/V Morning Sunrise as examples and noted that the reports of both these incidents are available from TSB website marine section ([www.tsb.gc.ca/en/marine/index.asp](http://www.tsb.gc.ca/en/marine/index.asp))

#### **F) DFO Vessel Safety / Vessel Length**

DFO prawn managers advised the Sectoral that the Department has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Transport Canada (TC) on Safety at Sea. According to a recent news release, the MOU is to formalize cooperation and to announce a national strategy between TC and DFO (Fisheries Management & Canadian Coast Guard) to establish, maintain and promote a safety culture within the fishing industry. According to DFO the MOU makes specific reference that there will be committee discussions of vessel modifications (bow and stern platforms) and vessel replacement rules. The latter reference includes the topic of vessel length policies.

DFO prawn managers also advised that they intend to start having the management plan reviewed by Coast Guard, Transport Canada, WorkSafe (formerly WCB), and Transportation Safety Board each year before it is finalized. Jim Morrison (DFO Lead Prawn Manager) also advised that DFO is proposing limiting the weight of traps to the current weights of normal double ring traps for the 2007 season. DFO is seeking industry advice on this proposal and on what should be considered a “normal” weight of a trap when wet.

DFO also noted that they may look at other aspects of the fishery to improve safety in the fishery, noting stacking provision rules, stability testing for vessels, no longer permitting stern extensions, prohibit carrying traps above the wheelhouse, not permitting any modifications that impact on vessel stability and give future consideration to removing vessel length restrictions.

### **G) Rockfish Bycatch**

DFO advised they had not finished their estimates of total rockfish bycatch at the time of the Sectoral meeting. The 2006 rockfish incidence rates had been completed and, overall, they appeared similar to previous years but were higher in statistical areas 10, 16, 17, 27, 28 and 29. This may affect the total rockfish bycatch numbers.

DFO advised the Rockfish Team was still interested in the prawn fishery and would continue to watch the fishery. The Team would like to see a reduction in the amount of rockfish bycatch by the prawn fleet.

Note: Rockfish bycatch continues to be a serious issue for the commercial prawn fleet. Clearly this issue is not going to go away. The Industry Caucus intends to continue its work with Malaspina University to see if there is a trap modification that can reduce rockfish bycatch. The PPFA has helped secure another grant from the federal government to fund some of the work at Malaspina University, thereby reducing the cost to the industry.

### **H) Fall Spawner Index Surveys**

DFO advised that all the data from the fall spawner index surveys has been collected and analyzed. These surveys are done to control recreational fishing, determining if prawn stocks in the area are weak or strong. DFO noted that nine areas were surveyed this fall and seven will be shut down to recreational fishing until April 1, 2007. Salmon & Sechelt Inlets will remain open as will Howe Sound as prawn stocks in these areas showed sufficient strength.

### **I) High Use Areas Subcommittee Report**

As PPFA members are aware, a subcommittee of the Prawn Sectoral Committee was struck some time ago to look at commercial and recreational fishing in three high use areas (Saanich Inlet, Stuart Channel and Alberni Inlet). An agreement was reached to try a pilot program in Saanich and Stuart starting in 2006. The agreement contained the following points:

- For the 2006 season, changes to the management of the fishery will only apply to Saanich Inlet and Stuart Channel.
- The goal is to increase the March spawner index from 1.7 to 3.4 over a two year period (2006 and 2007), with 50% of the increase occurring each year (Saanich and Stuart only).

- The existing 15% differential between commercial and recreational spawner index will be maintained. In other words, the spawner index will be increased for both sectors.
- DFO to monitor all sectors in these areas (Saanich and Stuart), including commercial, recreational, and First Nations users in 2006.
- The recreational fishery will close in these areas (Saanich and Stuart) at the beginning of the commercial fishery between May 1 and 7 in order to let that fishery settle in and aid in spawner index sampling.
- The commercial sector will assist in increased spawner index sampling in July and early August in Saanich Inlet and Stuart Channel.
- The recreational sector will move to a “pulse fishery” where these areas (Saanich and Stuart) close for that last two weeks of each month between Labor Day and the following March unless the spawner index is measured below threshold prior to that time.
- The recreational sector to consider implementing a coastwide annual limit for prawns to address high personal use by some individuals in some areas.
- This type of discussion to be continued and expanded to include First Nations groups and may include Alberni Inlet in 2007.

The subcommittee last met on November 14<sup>th</sup> to review what happened in Saanich & Stuart in 2006, confirm plans for 2007 for these areas and begin discussions on Alberni Inlet. This meeting was more an information session and scoping exercise. For Alberni Inlet, the area in question consists of statistical subareas 23-1, 23-2 and 23-3.

The next meeting of this subcommittee has been scheduled for January 23, 2007. The Industry Caucus has contacted some of the commercial fishermen who work this areas. If you work the Alberni Canal and haven't been contacted, please contact the PPFA office.

## **J) Future Scientific Licences**

DFO advised that because of recent court decisions (i.e., Larocque case), the Department will no longer be able to conduct the post season testing program as it has in the past. The Department is no longer able to use fish to pay for DFO activities. DFO put forward three possible options for consideration as ways to conduct testing in the future:

1. fish, but release all prawns (wasn't made clear how this would help deal with funding surveys).
2. conduct the testing as part of First Nations food, social and ceremonial fisheries for prawns.

3. somehow make the testing an option in the commercial fishery (e.g., some vessels forgoe the last week of the season and fish later allowing the surveys to be conducted; it was not clear how this would actually work).

The Industry Caucus had discussed this matter prior to the Prawn Sectoral Committee meeting. The Caucus reps felt that it was important for the industry to stay firmly involved and in control of the testing. Caucus also felt that instead of a short-term, band-aid fix to this problem a long-term solution needed to be developed.

As a result, Caucus recommended to DFO that the industry will continue to supply vessels, gear and crews to conduct the testing over the next year, working with DFO to conduct the testing in as cost-effective manner as possible. This would leave time to develop a long term strategy to address surveying prawn stocks to ensure they are not overfished by the recreational sector.

### **K) Medium Size Prawn Assessment**

Mike Kattilakoski (DFO Prawn Technician) made a presentation of the results from work he has undertaken looking at the amount of medium prawns in the overall catch. Mike was also looking at the potential impacts on overall catch if the minimum size was increased from 33mm to 34mm.

Based on logbook data and samples from landings, Mike noted the number of mediums represents between 24-28% of the total catch. Based on the information collected, Mike commented that increasing the minimum size limit would mean that more sorting would be required.

One possible solution noted would be to increase mesh size; this would mean less sorting on the vessel, would reduce handling mortalities of undersize prawns. However, it was also acknowledged that it is unknown what the catch composition would be from using larger mesh traps and changing mesh size would represent a cost to industry.

There were a number of comments from the Sectoral representatives and observers present with regard to medium prawns. It was noted that product from Argentina and Russia is currently competing directly against BC medium prawns in the Japanese market.

However, it was also noted that just a few years ago the Japanese market seemed to want medium prawns. Some buyers commented that the Japanese market has slowed as frozen inventories have increased and the thinking is that prices may be lower in 2007 because of this increased volume.

DFO noted two options that could reduce the number of mediums in the catch: 1) increase mesh size; and, 2) delay the opening of the season until the third week in May. However, DFO advised this was an industry issue and would wait for direction from the Industry Caucus on whether any measures should be taken to reduce the number of mediums caught..



#### **L) 2006 Offshore Fishery Review**

Jim Morrison (DFO Lead Prawn Manager) noted that logbooks had yet to be received from two of the four vessels that participated in the 2006 offshore fishery. As a result, confidentiality restrictions applied and limited what data DFO could present.

Jim noted that the 2006 offshore fishery substantially increased DFO's workload for the year. In particular, the data management and analysis associated with the electronic monitoring (EM) systems from the vessels created significant work for DFO. Jim noted that the EM systems were put in place for enforcement purposes, to monitor vessels fishing activities as well as time and area fished. Jim expressed concern that much of the EM data was in a format that could not be easily used by enforcement personnel.

As a result, Jim Morrison recommended that an offshore fishery not be conducted in 2007, but noted that this was his own opinion and it had not been discussed with the other prawn managers. Jim advised that if the industry wanted to continue the offshore fishery in 2007, they should let DFO know and start speaking with the Department about how it could be done.

#### **M) 2007 Management Plan**

DFO advised that they intend to distribute a draft of the 2007 management plan to the Prawn Sectoral Committee in late January. DFO advised that they want comments back before the end of February so they can finalize the plan and send it to be approved.

#### **N) Next Meeting**

The next Prawn Sectoral Committee meeting is expected to take place in early April, 2007 in Nanaimo.