



The Alberta Fish & Game Association

6924 – 104 Street Edmonton, AB T6H 2L7

Phone: (780) 437-2342

Fax: (780) 438-6872

Email: office@afga.org

Website: www.afga.org

Honorable Mr. Kyle Fawcett
Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
323 Legislature Building
10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

March 17, 2015

Dear Honorable Kyle Fawcett,

Over many years the Alberta Fish and Game Association has worked with other stakeholders and government to ensure the sustainable use of our fish and wildlife resource and protection of their habitat. Alberta has a limited fishery resource but at the same time it is one of the favorite outdoor pursuits of Albertan's.

Over the last 40 years the Alberta Fish and Game Association has been involved in discussions in terms of the impact of the commercial non-selective gill net fishery on the fishery resource. The use of gill nets created non-predictable commercial fisheries that often led to significant bycatch of non-target species including walleye, northern pike and lake trout. Even the target species, lake whitefish were over harvested in some fisheries. The result often was the closure of the commercial fishery for years or anglings severely limited with essentially catch and release regulations.

With the release of Dr. Colby's Report: *Sustainability of Commercial Fisheries at Selected Lakes in Alberta's Commercial Fishery Zone E*, a new round of consultations were undertaken. The Alberta Fish and Game Association participated in various forums including meetings that involved the commercial fishing industry. It is noteworthy that the report was commissioned jointly by the commercial fishing industry and ESRD from a world renowned expert in the management of commercial fisheries. While the report centered on Zone E, similar issues existed across the province. The findings and recommendations were consistent with long held view points of anglers and the Alberta Fish and Game Association that the status quo could not continue. Closure of the commercial fishery or total restructuring including elimination of gill nets were the only supportable options. The conclusions from the report were no different than those that had been made in the past. As structured, the commercial fishery was not sustainable either economically or from a fishery management perspective.

The commercial fishing industry did not support restructuring that would have eliminated gill nets in favor of alternate gear such as trap nets. What followed was a period of manoeuvring by the commercial industry. Highly regulated test gill net fisheries with a goal of demonstrating selective harvest was possible occurred at several lakes in Zone E. The results showed that even with rigid controls; the non-predictability continued. Meetings between the commercial industry and government were ongoing. The Honorable Robin Campbell announced the closure of the commercial fishery in Alberta as of August 2014.

The Alberta Fish and Game Association applauds the minister for making this difficult decision. The long term consequences will be a net benefit economically, recreationally and from a management perspective for the province. The association conveyed to its members and the angling public the findings of the report, the nature of the discussions and the ultimate decision. These included articles in outdoor media, reports and presentations at AFGA events and posting the report online. The feedback received was overwhelming in support.

There is some misinformation being presented by the commercial industry that the decision will have a negative impact on fishery management in the future due to lake whitefish over- population. The reality is that the suspensions of commercial fisheries such as at Wabamum and Sturgeon Lakes have led to the development of some of the finest sport fisheries in the province. In north east Alberta, many lakes have not been commercially fished for a substantial time and they continue to rebound in spite of ongoing recreational and domestic fishing pressure.

While the fishery resource base is small in Alberta, the economic impact of the sportfishing industry across the province to both urban and rural communities is immense. Lesser Slave Lake alone hosts over 115,000 anglers a year. The ongoing cost of managing the fishery resource with all its benefits is small particularly when compared to other recreational pursuits. Some of these require additional infrastructure investment that can run into the tens of millions of dollars even in small rural communities.

The Alberta Fish and Game Association recognizes there are a few individuals that may be truly impacted by the decision. However, the rationale was backed by sound principals and was necessary for sustainably managing our fishery resource to provide the maximum benefit for Albertan's in a changing world.

On behalf of the Alberta Fish and Game Association and the angling public we thank you for making the right decision.

Yours in Conservation,



Wayne Lowry
President
Alberta Fish and Game Association

c.c. Travis Ripley, Executive Director, Fish and Wildlife Policy Branch