

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery

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Voice 1: For me, the reason we should be deconstructing our dinner is because our food is inescapably tied into a globalized and industrialized food system with very few exceptions.

Voice 2: Our connection with the rural fifteen per cent of the population that is growing the food has been disconnected and a lot of the urban areas don't really know where their food comes from.

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour guide to more educated eating. This program is produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia and is heard on radio stations around the world and through our weekly Podcast. I'm Jon Steinman.

As is the starting point for much of the content of this program, Canadians and North Americans as a whole are disconnected from where our food comes from. This is a recurring remark made here on Deconstructing Dinner, but no where is this closer to the truth than when looking at how disconnected we have become to the food that we consume from our oceans, from our lakes, our rivers, our streams. The visual loss of where our food originates *does* exist on *land*: most dairy cattle, pigs and chickens never see the light of day, nor do we see them; grain crops are grown as far away from where people live as possible; and the majority of the foods on our grocery store shelves contain ingredients that did not even originate anywhere near this country. But in the case of our food from the sea, only a fraction of the Canadian population lives by the ocean, and those who do are only exposed to a glistening sheet of water stretching out to the horizon, oblivious of what lies beneath.

When we think of food from the ocean and think of Canada, it is without doubt our country's populations of wild salmon that pop into mind. Back in February 2006, Deconstructing Dinner ran a one-hour feature on the *farmed* salmon industry along the coast of British Columbia. We learned of the effects such industrial aquaculture practices are having on the West Coast stocks of wild salmon. That broadcast was titled Norway, British Columbia.

And it will be salmon yet again that we will visit with on today's broadcast, but instead we will learn of the management of Canada's *wild* salmon populations and the history of how such an important industry began heading in the same direction that eventually led to the collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery.

On the broadcast we will here segments of a presentation by Dennis Brown, author of the book *Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery*.

increase music and fade out

Jon Steinman: The featured speaker on today's Deconstructing Dinner is Dennis Brown. Dennis is a member of a third-generation fishing family and was born and raised in Vancouver. He was educated at the University of British Columbia and, in 1980, joined the staff of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (the UFAWU), where he worked as the Union's Fraser Valley organizer dealing primarily with the gillnet and troll fleets. In 1990 he was elected to the post of Business Agent and three years later became Secretary-Treasurer. In 1996 he was hired as Premier Glen Clark's Special Advisor on the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and he currently lives in Burnaby, British Columbia.

His experience within the salmon fishing industry led him to, in 2005, author the book *Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery*. The book tackles what is undoubtedly one of the most confusing and misunderstood segments of our food system, and his book looks into the history of the West Coast salmon resource, and it exposes the controversies surrounding the Canada-United States Pacific Salmon Treaty, and the subsequent Alaska ferry blockade.

In September 2005, Dennis spoke at the Vancouver Public Library where he was recorded by the Necessary Voices Society. He launched his presentation with a reading of the first chapter of his book titled "On the Brink of Disaster." The chapter introduces Dennis's father and *his* recollection of the events of 1958, when a glut of salmon encouraged the powerful canning industry to reduce the price paid per pound to fishermen. The fishermen did not submit to what would essentially be slave wages. Here we begin to see the similarities between our land-based agricultural system and that of the open seas, where in one instance farmers in Canada and around the world are in some of the worst financial positions ever, as the rest of the food system makes record profits, and where in the case of Canada's fisheries, fishermen are faced with a very similar scenario.

Dennis Brown: Every story has a beginning and this one starts in 1994, when the West Coast fishing industry changed forever. That year critics alleged that commercial fishermen had fished B.C.'s precious salmon stocks to within twelve hours of disaster. And that year Canadians went to war with the United States of America over Pacific salmon.

But my most vivid memory of that time, however, is personal. It is of my father, Alan Brown, struggling to loosen a rusty sprocket from the propeller shaft of his gillnet troller, the Seadeuce. A few days earlier he had been gillnetting for Fraser River sockeye in Sabine Channel when the shaft bearings had seized. Now he was desperately trying to fix the damage so he could get back out fishing. But no matter what he did the sprocket would not budge. He tried to loosen it by hitting it with a blowtorch and even to weld a steel bar directly onto the sprocket and lever it with a six ton hydraulic jack. But that sprocket would not budge.

When he was building the boat in his backyard in the years between 1963 and 1967 he had anticipated engine failure, as all fishermen do, and created a unique system, a main engine supplemented by an auxiliary motor, both connected to a single propeller shaft. He designed a heavy sprocket, over twelve inches in circumference and three inches wide, to fit onto the shaft. When necessary, the clutch on the main engine could be disengaged and the more fuel-efficient auxiliary connected to the sprocket gears by a series of chains would drive the propeller. Now, after many years, the sprocket had rusted and the shaft could no longer be pulled out for repairs.

That day, August 28th 1994, while he toiled in the cramped engine room of his boat, I was in Vancouver at a meeting of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) on behalf of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union. I was a member of a DFO advisory committee waging an "aggressive" fishing strategy to force the U.S. to renew the expired annexes of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

After the meeting I called my father to let him know the DFO was planning to open the Gulf of Georgia the next day to all commercial salmon license holders to trawl for sockeye. For decades he had trawled in the Gulf every year and had commented that it was nice fishing, as if there was such a thing. But in 1981 the DFO had instituted an area licensing policy that limited access to only three hundred trollers, and he had been shut out of the Gulf of Georgia ever since.

When my father first began fishing in 1950 commercial fishermen took pride in fishing on a full-time, year round basis, and he often cursed the moonlighters who came along at the peak of the season to compete with the bona fide fishermen. In those days anyone could become a commercial fisherman for all species of fish by simply paying a one dollar license fee. The lives of bona fide fishermen changed irrevocably when the federal government began to impose a host of regulations and restrictions to "modernize" the salmon fishery and make it "efficient" and "rational."

Yet, despite this constant meddling, the West Coast fishery had not become more viable. In fact, ever since the limited-entry licensing scheme had been introduced in 1969, fishermen had faced a steady erosion of their fishing privileges. At the same time they had been forced to fish much harder to get out

of debt, which they had incurred because they had to buy a separate fishing license often worth thousands and thousands of dollars for virtually every species.

Now, for the first time in almost a quarter of a century, the DFO was about to reverse its habit of restriction, although very briefly, because the bilateral Pacific Salmon Commission, founded in 1985 to supervise fisheries in B.C., the Northwestern States and Alaska, had predicted an enormous build up of late-run sockeye in the Gulf of Georgia over the next few days.

The DFO's decision was made to satisfy Ottawa's short-term political needs rather than the needs of the fishermen. But the battalions of experts who try to make commercial fishing a more economically rational enterprise seldom ever consider it a problem from the fishermen's point of view.

While he worked on his boat that day in 1994, my father was thinking about the nineteen million salmon forecast to return to the Fraser River, some of which he would catch the next day if he fixed his propeller shaft on time. Where would the main schools be concentrated? How would the tide and the presence of such a large fishing fleet affect their movement?

Each run of Fraser River salmon, which this year would include the dominant cycle of the famous Adams River run, had its own unique behaviour. Some runs moved up the river quickly, others stayed outside the mouth of the river for weeks. Pinks and other species have two year spawning cycles but sockeye return to spawn in four and five year cycles, and my father had chased many cycles of Adams River sockeye during his forty-five year fishing career.

He remembered the famous Adams River run of 1958 and about the canners who had decided to cut the price to the fisherman because there was such a glut of fish. The UFAWU armed itself with a 90.26 per cent rejection vote and stood its ground. A strike deadline was set for August 9th and the canners agreed on August 16th to pay the previous year's prices, which at that time were twenty-eight cents a pound or better.

Then, during the week of August 22nd, the unexpected happened: millions of sockeye bound for the Fraser River poured through Johnstone Strait, just north of Campbell River. In 1958 the forecast for the run had been good but nobody had expected the bonanza that occurred because of the northern diversion. Despite an unprecedented fishing effort, millions of Sockeye evaded the commercial fleet and entered the Gulf of Georgia. Thousands of part-time fishermen joined the rush for the spoils and the government responded by imposing a series of license policies that wreaked havoc on the lives of bona fide fishermen, not to mention the salmon, in the years ahead.

By the end of August 1958 the B.C. canneries were plugged with a massive inventory: 1.8 million cases of canned salmon. So they were relieved when the DFO imposed a closure throughout most of the month of September to protect the Adams River sockeye, which normally delay for more than a month before entering the Fraser.

However, before the closure ended, the canners announced they didn't want to buy any of the millions of surplus sockeye still milling around in the Gulf of Georgia. James Sinclair, formerly the Federal Minister of Fisheries and now a spokesman for the Fisheries Association of B.C, claimed that, "the tail end sockeye are not fit to can" and could only be fed to "Eskimos and Native Indians."

Canners, however, said they would reconsider their position if the fishermen agreed to cut the price from twenty-eight cents a pound to seventeen cents a pound. The Union membership refused to accept the cut and voted to boycott any company paying less than the contract price, which they had agreed to just in August. In return, the canners called Homer Stevens, who was the President of the Union at the time, a dictator and imposed a lockout, and millions of salmon in excess of the spawning goal headed up the river.

But on that day in 1994 my father told me his story about the 1958 lockout. "That was a tough year," he said. "When the lockout started, we knew we couldn't fish for the prices the canners wanted. I mean, how could we? It would have meant working for slave wages. So we swore that we would never give in, that we would fight until the last man standing, until the last dog was hung, as we used to say during the war."

The hell of it was, though, the canners could afford to wait it out but a lot of fishermen couldn't. Plenty of guys went broke that winter. And even though most of the Adams River run was wasted, the company boys were still driving fancy cars and puffing big cigars.

After the canners lockout in 1958 no further fishing occurred that year. And by mid-October no one was sure how many fish were headed up the river. The federal Fisheries Department estimated the number to be as high as four million. Canners claim that more than ten million sockeye would go to waste and blamed this on the actions of the UFAWU.

On October 10th the Union demanded that the federal Fisheries Minister, Angus MacLean, buy the excess salmon as part of humanitarian food program. MacLean and the rest of the Ottawa bureaucracy dodged the issue and the press claimed that the greed of the UFAWU members had caused the company lockout, which in turn had resulted in an over-escapement on the spawning grounds.

The Union leadership replied on October 24th. In an editorial in the Fishermen's newspaper, the UFAWU said, "The truth of the tragic situation is that the Salmon Commission made an error in judging the number of fish available for spawning - waited too long to clean up the situation. The canners washed their hands of the responsibility and, in so doing, broke their signed agreement with the Union. And the federal government through its Minister of Fisheries refused to help find a solution. In all this mess, the fishermen and the public were the real victims, and the many thousands of valuable fish were wasted."

On October 30th the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission met to discuss the large surplus escapement flooding the spawning grounds, and the Commissioners voted unanimously to install an electric fence at the mouth of the Adams River on Shuswap Lake to ensure the more than 1.7 million prime quality spawners already in the river were not disturbed by the massive late arrivals. "This unprecedented action appears essential if we are to forestall a serious decline in the returning run in 1962," said Canadian Senator Tom Reid, Chairman of the Commission.

However, four years later, in the spring of 1962 the IPSFC announced that "adverse estuarial conditions" in the brood year have resulted in a poor return for the Adams River. Consequently, in 1962, four years later when those fish came back, thanks to the lockout, it was a disaster instead of a record return as in 1958. Eventually the IPSFC was forced to admit that the "total Adams River escapement in 1962 (the total returned) is not expected to meet the maximum requirements."

But that was 1958 and this was 1994. My father would either repair the shaft bearings in the next few hours or he would miss the chance to drop his line for one last time in the Gulf of Georgia.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, where we are listening to Dennis Brown author of the book *Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery*. In September 2005 Dennis was recorded reading the first chapter of the book at an event in Vancouver. If you miss any of today's show it will be archived on our website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

In this next segment, Dennis Brown continues with the 1994 story of the fish war with the Americans and how, in that year, the American salmon fishery over-harvested the Fraser River salmon. The media subsequently reported that the all-important Adams River salmon run had been destroyed, with so-called fisheries experts blaming the incident on British Columbia's commercial fishermen and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. There was *no* mention of any American involvement. This event prompted Ottawa in 1996 to cut the commercial fleet by more than half. As this incident was also on the heels of the Atlantic cod collapse, the public granted no sympathy for B.C. fishermen as this was seen by most as an act of greed by the fishermen themselves.

Dennis Brown: The following day more than a thousand trollers were slated to fish in the Gulf of Georgia at the behest of federal Fisheries Minister Brian Tobin, who was waging the fish war against the Americans.

“Screw it. Let’s go home,” my father announced. It was getting dark and the damned sprocket had not budged. I agreed reluctantly. I had hoped to join him as a deck hand the next day. Instead I attended yet another meeting at the DFO offices.

When I arrived a small group of officials were already pouring over reams of statistical data. In the chair was Dave Schutz, a quiet-spoken fellow whose job it was to keep track of all salmon fisheries along the coast. At his side were Wayne Sato, a Fraser River sockeye specialist, and Bud Graham, Director of Fisheries Management, and several others.

In short order I discovered that the hauls from the troll fishery that morning – August 29th, 1994 - were far below expectation. Before starting the telephone conference call with the staff of the Pacific Salmon Commission and the American side of the Fraser Panel, the Canadian contingent caucus. Given the poor results, were apprehensive about allowing the Gulf of Georgia troll fishery to continue. But a Vancouver Island Fisheries manager spoke vociferously over the speaker-phone against curtailing the net fishery in Johnstone Strait. “Don’t forget, the Gulf of Georgia is a huge bloody area,” he cried. “When those Adams sockeye go deep they are really hard to find, even if there are over a thousand damned trollers out there.” He also reminded everyone that in 1993 the DFO had underestimated the largest run of sockeye on that cycle since 1913. So fisheries off northern Vancouver Island and Johnstone Strait had been curtailed while millions of surplus sockeye were wasted.

When the bilateral conference call began, Jim Woody, Chief Biologist for the Pacific Salmon Commission, reported a catch of approximately 111,000 sockeye for the first day of the Canadian troll fishery. Not a bad catch, but nowhere near what had been expected.

The Canadian Fraser Panel concluded that it was best to close the troll fishery the following day, although the DFO did leave open the option of fishing again if more sockeye appeared. I agreed with that decision, but I was also thinking of my old man, staring at that rusty sprocket, and I was secretly hoping more fish would show up in a day or two.

My father, meanwhile, was returning the hydraulic jack he had rented and learning that the proprietor had mistakenly rented him a jack with only a fraction of the promised lifting power. My father returned to his boat with a better jack and gave it one mighty push. The sprocket screeched, and like some gigantic Jurassic vertebrae it rotated slowly on the propeller shaft.

But unbeknownst to him, however, it was too late. The fish war of 1994 was already over and his attempt to troll one last time in the Gulf of Georgia had been foiled. For him an era had ended without ceremony. But for the West Coast fishery as a whole an era of turmoil had just begun.

On August 31st, 1994 the DFO announced that all Canadian salmon fisheries were closed for the balance of the season for conservation reasons. At this point DFO managers claimed there were still enough sockeye left to ensure that optimum escapement targets were met, assuming that the Americans stopped fishing. However, because of Tobin's aggressive fishing strategy and the high diversion of the run through Johnstone Strait, the Americans then had poor catches all season. So now they insisted they would continue to fish until they caught their rightful share, and the sockeye of the Adams River run, which were still lying just across the border off Point Roberts, only a few miles from the river's mouth, were an easy target.

U.S. commercial fisheries continued all through the week ending September 3rd and into the week of September 10th. Thus, from August 28th onward, the Americans harvested some 736,500 Fraser River sockeye, a catch that made the difference between a reasonable escapement and a disaster.

When the fish finally entered the river at the end of September, the test fishery revealed that the total 1994 sockeye run was almost two million less than predicted. This prompted *Vancouver Sun* reporter Mark Hume to write that the legendary Adams River sockeye run had been wrecked.

A host of so-called fisheries experts, including John Fraser, claimed that the debacle had been called by "attitudinal anarchy" of the DFO and a grab-all attitude from B.C.'s commercial fishermen. No mention was made of the slaughter just across the international boundary line at Point Roberts. Scores of scientists, independent fisheries experts, environmentalists, government officials and journalists clamored to have the commercial fleet slashed.

In response, in 1996 Ottawa introduced the Pacific Salmon fleet restructuring program, generally known as the Mifflin Plan, followed by the Anderson Plan in 1998. In short order, the fleet was reduced by more than half. Fishing privileges were concentrated in ever fewer hands, and coastal communities were thrown into profound turmoil.

In another era, the problems facing B.C. fishermen might have aroused public sympathy, but not now. On the heels of the East Coast cod collapse, which to many Canadians symbolized the wanton plunder of the natural environment, the participants were seen as looters, bent on fishing the last fish. Consequently, saving endangered salmon became a cause célèbre for the dominant elites and vilification of commercial fishermen an easy substitute for changing the way

society as a whole threatens our salmon resource. Ottawa claimed that it had acted in the name of conservation but it can be argued that the subsequent dismantling of the West Coast commercial salmon fishery had more to do with the interest of powerful fishing companies than the health of the resource.

Reflecting on the plight of commercial fisheries around the world, as cultural anthropologist James R. McGoodwin notes, "The major problems in the fisheries today worldwide are not the biological depletion of fish stocks, economic overcapitalization and so forth. Rather, they are the deleterious consequences of these very same conditions for the human participants in the fishery. Many fisheries problems are merely a small but connected part of the more pervasive problems in the world and political and economic order." This certainly holds true for the West Coast fishing industry. Its collapse was caused by government mismanagement but it was working people, not politicians, who paid the price. And although the turmoil that ensued was often described as the death rattle of an outmoded industry, it was in fact symptomatic of a much greater sickness afflicting our contemporary society.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. That last segment concluded the reading of Chapter 1 of the book *Salmon Wars* by author Dennis Brown, the book was released in 2005 by Harbour Publishing.

Following this reading, Dennis fielded a number of questions from the audience, one of which asked Dennis to describe one particular incident involving B.C. salmon fishermen at the Cultus Lake salmon run. This incident suggests one example of why the common argument that wild salmon stocks were simply overfished is false.

The Cultus Lake story further illustrates how our society's blind pursuit for happiness through outdoor recreation can often be at the expense of an extremely fragile and well-evolved natural system. Such a pursuit is also at the expense of a secure food supply, if managed properly.

Dennis Brown: I was a little bit nervous that I would meet somebody tonight, and maybe I will yet, who will say, "You're a bunch of hooey. You commercial fishermen have been overfishing the fish and you're to blame." I brought this little chart, which I made up. I went and did research back to 1948. This is on this year's cycle. Everybody knows that there is a different cycle of sockeye. And this is sockeye only, going into the Fraser River. They are in four-year units.

This is the famous Horsefly run this year. The yellow bar is the amount of spawners that go up the river. They call that the escapement. The blue bar is the return the following four years that that escapement produced. The red line is what they call the productivity ratio: the number of adults that returned per number of spawners.

And you can see our so-called nefarious commercial fishermen, who have been “overfishing and fishing the last fish out” over the last fifty years, managed to build the famous Horsefly run. Incidentally, if I had more room on this graph I would take it back another forty years. It was down to (what was it Richard?) about a thousand fish, not from overfishing, from habitat destruction. I really have to say, because the DFO did not spend the money, it was out of the fishermen’s pockets. It was the only way these runs were rebuilt. They got it up to twenty-four million in 1993 - fairly recent history.

But, you just heard me read a chapter from my book, things went haywire in 1994. The politics in the industry changed. All of a sudden fishermen were the bad guys: “attitudinal anarchy” - you heard the quotes. John Fraser and all these experts said we need more fish in the spawning grounds. No more irresponsible overfishing. And so the runs, the escapements, started to go up.

In this run, the Horsefly run is so tiny you couldn’t even put it on this graph. It would be probably less than .001 per cent of this run. It’s a stock of about, in a good year, four or five thousand fish; in a poor year, two or three hundred fish. It’s one tiny lake at the bottom of the river system.

And in the cycle year of 2001, a record of five-and-a-half million sockeye were put on the spawning grounds. People like Richard Nomura, who is a Fraser River gillnetter here tonight, didn’t fish, didn’t overfish, didn’t fish at all to put those fish up. And low and behold the run is not coming back.

Do I know? Do I have a biology degree? No. Do I know why? But all I can say to you is, when you hear the story about overfishing, don’t buy it. It’s not true.

Now, let me just go back to the Cultus, and I hope I’m not jumping around too illogically here. The Cultus stock has been depressed for decades. The reason why it’s depressed is - everybody knows what Cultus Lake is - it is a recreational paradise.

The Cultus stock is very unique among sockeye because it doesn’t spawn in rivers: it’s what is known as a lake spawner. Some species of sockeye are unique that way. There are four places in Cultus Lake where the sockeye have been known to spawn. Two of those spawning grounds are dead; two are remaining. In one of those two there is a marina built right over the adjacent spawning bed. And into that lake, every single day of the year, flows huge amounts of phosphates, huge amounts of chemicals. There is what the scientists term – I learned this big word the other day – eutrophication happening in that fresh water. There are people discharging their septic tanks there. There are people roaring around in speedboats. There are people having a wonderful time not even knowing that those fish are in that lake.

In the last thirty years, the recreational boaters brought in Eurasian milfoil, a famous weed that grows in our freshwater lakes, and it has taken over the lake. And it happens to grow very well in those spawning beds where the salmon used to spawn.

To add to that problem is a fish called the pikeminnow, which lives in the weeds. And I think everybody here knows, because you are all from B.C., that sockeye are unique as salmon because they live a whole year in freshwater, unlike the other species. So these little baby sockeye that are swimming around for a year, they are being chased by the pikeminnow and they are getting wiped out.

So let me just backtrack to 1990 - not that long ago. A group of commercial fisherman, not the government and, so far as I know, nobody at an environmental foundation or anything like that, went in and they got some boats and some nets and they had a program to clean up the pikeminnow. I have read, and I can show anybody that's interested, biologists' reports that showed that when they cleaned up the predator fish the return, or the survival, in freshwater of the Cultus Lake stock dramatically rose. Now when I say dramatically, if you only have three hundred and you get six hundred that's a big increase. But still, it's not big numbers but it's profoundly important.

So what has happened this year, or in the last couple of years? The provincial government is responsible for freshwater habitat. In my book, if you care to buy it and read it, there are all kinds of references to budget cuts and habitat programs that have been cut. The provincial government slashed the milfoil cleanup program for Cultus Lake and made a thirty thousand dollar budget cut. Thirty thousand dollars a year is all it costs. They cut the program, and they turn around and say to the federal government, "You look after the Cultus stock." Close a multi-million dollar commercial fishery on huge surpluses of fish, impoverish Coastal communities. But we are going to cut that program. And by the way, it's all in the aid of the Cultus.

So what do the poor fishermen do? They stepped up to the plate again, the Area E fishermen's group. And they said, "We'll take our boats and we'll go in there with our labour, and we'll even put money in." Believe it or not, these bad guys were prepared to put up ten grand - which may not seem a lot to some people but it is a lot to unemployed fishermen - if the government would match the money (the two governments), and go in there and clean up the pikeminnow. And the government said no.

Every day you are treated in the news to the terrible plight of the Cultus. I want to make it clear, I'm not standing up here making short shrift out of the plague of the Cultus, and neither is Richard or anybody else. We're onside. But what I am really angry about is that the government is so hypocritical and lies to you people about what they are doing and how they doing such a wonderful job.

We are now seeing some of our strongest runs, I argue, collapsing because they are not being harvested anymore. Large, excess numbers of spawners are going into the spawning grounds, just like in 1958, and the lakes cannot feed them. The brood stock, which goes out the following year - on this run we are seeing some of the smallest smolts in history. They went out into a marine environment where there are all kinds of hazards which nobody knows about, but in that state they were threatened.

All I hear these days is, "It's the fishermen. It's the fishermen." I even heard somebody that I used to have a lot of respect for, and I better stop here, a very senior member of the environmental community, calling for those fishermen to be thrown in jail, just the other day. And that's not good enough. We have got to pull together - fishermen, environmentalists, the public – and save these fish, and stop blaming the wrong people.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and today's broadcast titled *Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery*. The show provides a window into a common food source of Canadians that most of us know very little about.

Much of the information contained within the book titled *Salmon Wars* is so shocking that learning how poorly managed our country's wild salmon has been, both historically and today, can mark an easy entry into a more encompassing understanding of how poorly managed much of our country's food supply is.

Author Dennis Brown spent three years working in the Office of the Premier of British Columbia, where he observed first hand how a resource he understood all too well was managed by those who knew very little. When we return after this short musical intermission, Dennis will share his thoughts on the mismanagement of such an important Canadian resource.

Song – "Salmon Song," by Good Dog, from the album Tunes From the Tides (Indy)

You get a line and I'll get a pole, honey
You get a line and I'll get a pole, babe
You get a line and I'll get a pole
We'll go down to the salmon hole
Honey, baby mine
Honey, baby mine

Wake up little kid
Don't sleep too late, honey
Wake up little kid
Don't sleep too late, babe
Wake up little kid, don't sleep too late

There's salmon in the bay today
Honey, baby mine

Yonder comes a man with fish on his back, honey
Yonder comes a man with a fish on his back, babe
Yonder comes a man with a fish on his back
Come on, let's go, get out of the sack
Honey, baby mine

You get a line and I'll get a pole, honey
You get a line and I'll get a pole, babe
You get a line and I'll get a pole
We'll go down to the salmon hole
Honey, baby mine
Honey, baby mine

[instrumental]

Jon Steinman: And that was the "Salmon Song" from the album *Tunes From the Tides*, a release by the Alaskan musical duo known as Good Dog. The album features eleven original songs geared towards children, all of which are inspired by the marine environment.

On today's broadcast of *Deconstructing Dinner* we are listening to segments from an event recorded in September 2005 in Vancouver, British Columbia. In that same year, Burnaby's Dennis Brown released his book *Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery*. The book explores the management of the province's wild salmon stocks in both a historical and current context, and in this next segment from the event, he shares his thoughts following his experience working for three years as an advisor within the Office of the then Premier Glen Clark.

Dennis Brown: Working in the Premier's Office as I did, and I mention this in the book, I never ever succumbed to the belief that I was part of the political process. I was a working class guy who worked his way up in the union and got that job because of who I represented. But I never had any illusion that I was really part of the elites that run the government.

And I will be quite honest with you: it was the shock of a lifetime simply to see first hand how our society is run by unelected bureaucrats – and the power they have - and the relative impotence of elected politicians, and the profound way in which society hurtles along - we think we live in a democracy - and how little we as people are actually affecting that process.

That's my person feeling. I worked there for over four years, and I was quite disturbed by the lack of accountability: that isn't just a reflection of the NDP

government, which I was working for, I believe it runs right across the board. So it was unpleasant for me.

Aboriginal issues are a hugely controversial, painfully controversial issue in the fishing industry and they are a major problem facing our society. I personally am a very strong supporter of Aboriginal rights. And I believe very strongly that our society must settle Aboriginal claims honourably. But I am not going to berate you with my opinions on it. I will only make this observation: the antinomies within the fishing industry are particular and unique around this question.

I will only say this to the extent that it is true: Aboriginal people have harvested fish since the beginning of human settlement in this continent, and they have a special relationship with those fish, and they have a very special claim to a portion of those fish. The way in which our society, and the elites of our society, have pitted other working class people who depend on those fish and caused divisions along racial lines is truly an irresponsible and reprehensible disaster.

All too often, though, I hear people saying, "What's the matter with those commercial fishermen? Why are they so anti-native?" Or, "Why are they racist?" I will speak from the bottom of my heart: in the fishermen that I know, I have yet to meet genuine racists in the fishing industry. What I have met are people who are under constant threat, constant insecurity in the position in the investment that they have in the industry. And when I say investment, not just financial - it is their whole life.

And a very, very poor handling of the Aboriginal question, to this extent: in no other sector in the Canadian society or economy is, first of all, Aboriginal First Nation's participation as great as it is in the West Coast fishery - no where else - and yet, ironically, no where else in society is that particular industrial sector expected to pay such a hugely disproportionate price in the settlement, which every single one of us Canadian citizens owe to those people. And if there is a reason why there is so much friction, it's that simple fact.

Every fisherman that I know has said, "We support Aboriginal rights. We support their special - what the legal people call *suis generis* - rights to have fish for food. But we have difficulty when somebody comes along and arbitrarily takes a share of a finite resource for whatever reason, well-intentioned or not, and says, 'We are settling one social problem over here but we are going to leave you, the victims, without proper compensation.'" And I won't bore you tonight, but I could, if I was pressed, talk about the absolute hypocrisy of the government's so-called compensation. You have got a recipe for disaster.

And so I say that with the greatest deference to the fact that Aboriginal people need justice in this society. I have only vocalized my personal view, that working class commercial fishermen should not pay any greater price than any other person in Canada.

Jon Steinman: As the question and answer period continued, Dennis Brown was asked about the technological innovations in fishing salmon and what impact such technology has on wild salmon stocks. He was also asked how the role of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (the DFO) has changed.

Dennis Brown: There are no trollers operating on salmon in this province. There is quite a debate about the methods of trolling, although they even have done quite a bit to change their technology.

But let me just give you an example of the most efficient type of fishing for salmon on this coast, which is the seine fleet. Everybody knows from their school books the seiners have a larger boat. They have usually a crew of five or six. They circle around with a great big net and they then close the bottom of that net and anything in that circle is caught, unlike what Richard does with the gillnet, which snares the fish by the gills in a smaller boat and a smaller net.

Before the Mifflin Plan, when seiners used to go out fishing - they're pretty big boats. My book describes the whole growth of the seine fleet, which I believe was overly large because it was corporate dominated compared to the small fishery, but that's another story. When a skipper set a seine net in a place like Johnstone Strait or in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, they set the net, then they'd put out a skiff, and they'd go and either tie up to the beach or tie up to a boat or a skiff. They would circle around with a great big, powerful boat and very quickly close it up; then, with a very strong, powerful hydraulic drum wrap that net in. What would happen would be at the end of the set a big bag of fish - if there is any amount of fish - would get hauled up. In latter days they actually changed the design of the seine boats so that they had tilt sterns that would go down into the water and lift the bag of fish up and flip it up. Then they would release that bag, and the deck would flow with fish. And then, while the skipper ran back to go make another set, his crew would be shovelling the fish down into the hatch. They would go and make another set fifteen minutes later. That's how long that would take.

Now, when they make a set, they have to stop at the end of the set. When it's closed, they have to slowly bring the net in. They have to take what is called a brailer and they have to dip out any species, like coho or any bi-catch non-target species, and carefully release them. But the point I am making, though, is that even though these are grossly over-capitalized vessels, the way the fisheries are now managed, their technology and their power is greatly curbed because of all these regulations.

As to what are the DFO doing, I have no idea but I'll make one observation about some of the people I know in the DFO. Twenty years ago, the cadre of managers in the DFO used to pride themselves on getting fisheries going, protecting stocks, walking creeks, making sure habitat wasn't being damaged. Some of them used

to live in remote coastal communities and in remote coastal inlets, like Rivers Inlet and places like that. They used to walk the streams.

Now almost all of the fisheries officers are in urban areas or centralized communities. Increasingly, more and more of them are bound to their desks doing paper work. They don't have the fuel to put in their trucks and their boats.

I have gone through Freedom of Information files and seen all the memos on this. They have witnessed massive cuts, by more than half of their former enforcement and habitat protection budgets. An increasing number of the old guard which used to know about how you get fisheries going – they'd fly by the seat of their pants, some of them - are retiring, and there is a new cadre of DFO people which tend – and I don't mean to be unfair - to be inexperienced in managing fisheries and quite reluctant to have fisheries for fear that something will go wrong. I don't think that is what we need a DFO for.

I make this point and they don't like it, but if we are going to go down the road we are at now, where there is not going to be any fishing any more and runs that are harvestable, I don't know why we are paying people \$150,000 dollars a year to sit in offices and stare at computers. We might as well just say, "Close the Fisheries Department down."

Now, that's kind of a demagogic statement but it's not far off the truth, because unless they are going to actually deliver fisheries and provide food and provide jobs, I wonder what their role is. They can't solely be to just save the fish as wild icons. And here's my reason why I say that: because if that is all we do with these fish, let me warn you, the fish are doomed. Because when nobody cares about them because their jobs depend on them, there won't be anybody there cares when the logging damages them, or the pollution goes into the stream, or when the predators.... so there's something to be said.

Some very, very profoundly influential thinkers that I mention in this book, like Parzival Copes and others, have tied the whole notion of ecological sustainability to social community equity. I think we need to swing a little bit of the hard-line preservationism a little bit more back to the fact that humans count in the system.

Jon Steinman: Dennis Brown's book *Salmon Wars* is very critical of the management of Canada's West Coast salmon fishery, and he was presented with one very important question, and that was, "Are there any examples of management systems that actually work well?" And here was his response.

Dennis Brown: I wish you wouldn't ask me that, because I have to admit something that I hate, because if you read this book you'll see that I am not a big fan of Alaska, because they steal a lot of our fish.

But if you want to find a place where the fishery works as good as you're ever going to find anywhere in the world - you are going to make me spit it out - it's Alaska. And you know why? Because there are seven hundred thousand people living in Alaska, and, except for a little bit of oil up wherever they get it, most of the people in Alaska depend on the fishery. As much as I hate their right-wing Republican government, or whatever, those politicians go, "If we don't look after the fishermen we don't have any base."

They have a policy that I think is absolutely terrific. I mention it in this book: it's called owner-operator policy. The only people that can have a boat or a license in Alaska are people who actually fish and people that are actually small-scale harvesters.

The other thing they did, which is absolutely astounding, aside from the fact that they live in a relatively wild state compared to even B.C. or at least the Lower Mainland, is they built community-based hatcheries, where they actually said, "We are going to generate fish here and we are going to let you people get the benefits."

Is it perfect? No. I know the David Suzuki Foundation a few years ago put out a book a few years ago that I eagerly read called *Fisheries That Work*. I was rather disappointed at the end of it because I don't think that there is any fishery anywhere in the world that works perfectly. But I think that's about as close, and it's close to what we have in the way of similar types of boats, people and fish.

The only thing is we are luckier than Alaska because, despite the fact that they have huge runs, they only have a couple of species of salmon. They have pink salmon and they have chum salmon. Some sockeye, but nowhere near the numbers we have. And they don't have the chinooks that we have. So we have actually a more diverse salmon base but we don't get the same kind of returns. And Alaska was very fiercely possessive of its right to manage the fishery, whereas in our context the federal government runs the fishery.

Some of you will not have been there but I went there many times: there is a building in Kent Street in the middle of Ottawa, and there is a thousand people working in that building, and there is not an ocean for a thousand miles. And you go, "What are all these...?" These aren't worker bees: these are slick Deputies and Assistant Deputies, and they have all got assistants, and they are in the upper elite. You really have to wonder how you can run a fishery back in Ottawa in B.C. - you can't.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, where we are listening to segments from the question and answer period at an event featuring Dennis Brown, author of the book *Salmon Wars: The Battle for the West Coast Salmon Fishery*.

In this next segment, Dennis responds to a question asking how *he* would suggest the DFO go about managing wild salmon stocks effectively.

Dennis Brown: First thing I would do is I would end this despicable, penurious right-wing neo-Conservative ideology that says that everything that governments do has got to be cut down to the bone. You know the rest of it. That's the first place to start.

DFO was slashed in half during the Tory budget-cutting era. And guess what? They didn't slash Kent Street, as I just mentioned. They slashed the guys that walked the Joaquina Lake system. They slashed the guys that used to go out in the dead of night and catch poachers. They slashed the people that used to sail out into the mid-Pacific to study temperature gradients and what was going with the ocean. The guys with the suitcases and the big shots survived. So the first thing that I would do is restore the DFO's funding.

The next thing I would do, and I mention this at length in this book, is I would restore the salmon enhancement program, which was one of the finest examples of - and I am not ashamed of this term - "social engineering" in the history of this country, because it did two things, for what was approximately only two hundred million spent over I think it was seven years. It created vast amounts of fish - hugely productive returns in terms of the amount of money spent. I think I heard the best cost-benefit analysis was \$1.70 for every dollar spent: if you can find me a mutual fund that returns that I want to know where it is. The second thing is they took salmon enhancement into little kids' classrooms. They raised little salmon and most died. But they raised salmon and those little kids got to know those fish, and they walked down and they released those fish into the water. And they started bugging their parents saying, "Don't put paint down the" You know the rest of the story. That is what I call a cultured society's approach to a problem.

What did they do? They've cut salmon enhancement to the bone. The only money that's left for salmon enhancement now is to run a few of the hatcheries that are left and keep the pumps turning. So that will be the first thing I would do.

The second thing I would do is re-think the whole notion - and this book is thick with political economy - about these right-wing ideologists like Peter Pearce, who suggest that the way you develop a fishery is to let the free market figure out who should fish. I don't think that's right, because what that's going to get you in the long-run is big corporations, and they may not even be Jimmy Patterson, who is on his last legs - a Canadian fishing company - but it may be ... for all I know, the Republic of China could walk in here, and for small change for them, buy out every single fish in our Coast.

I say, go down to the thing that the Alaskans do, which is to say the people that harvest the fish be the first people to get it. It should be the people that live in the

Coastal communities first. You should not be able to do something that I mention in this book, which is to sit on the beach and rent out a license - some of them are individuals, many of them are companies - at luxurious rates, charging the people that do go out and fish rentier-style charges, and then not turn a wheel. So that's a fishing licensing policy.

Jon Steinman: And that was Dennis Brown, author of the book *Salmon Wars*, released in 2005 by Harbour Publishing. Today's recording is courtesy of the Vancouver-based Necessary Voices Society, who recorded Dennis speaking at an event held in September 2005.

You can learn more about the Necessary Voices Society on their website at necessaryvoices.org, and today's broadcast will also be archived on the Deconstructing Dinner website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner, where more information on today's topic will also be located.

In closing out the show today, I'll leave you with these final words by author Dennis Brown.

Dennis Brown: There is just an alarming loss of both freshwater and marine environment habitat in this province, and every one of us is responsible for it. We are all driving cars. We are all living in cities and suburbs. None of us can get high and mighty here and look down on the fishermen. We're all part of it. And so if we don't do those things we will not have salmon in the future. But I will tell you this: I am willing to stake my name on this - it won't be over-fishing that will finish them off.

ending theme

And that was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant John Ryan.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

This radio program is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener.

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Till next week.