Importance of NPAFC-related Science

Collecting biological data and looking for tags in juvenile salmon caught during a Canadian research cruise. Photo by Pacific Biological Station.

I officially retired on May 27 of this year. I did not stop work; I only adjusted my priorities and reduced my expectations. Research is simply too much fun to give up. Things that many people save for retirement, I did as part of my job and many of these adventures were associated with INPFC[1] and NPAFC. I think my first meeting was in 1977[2] and I never missed a meeting after 1977. Last year was almost a miss, but my nurse (my wife) and I made it to the annual meeting in Korea. This year's meeting is in Nanaimo and I am not on the official Canadian delegation. However, I plan to show up from time to time.

I met some remarkable people during my involvement with INPFC and NPAFC. Some are no longer with us, but it is only their physical presence that is gone. When I started with our organization, there was a level of confrontation among countries. Over time, this ended and changed to a commitment to cooperation that is a model for international organizations. BASIS probably was the concept that turned NPAFC into a team of integrated researchers that share information in order to develop the best management possible for Pacific salmon. The science is important, but, again, it is always the people that stand out. Everyone in NPAFC helps each other. Everyone is concerned about their colleagues in other countries particularly when there are health issues or national disasters.

Our colleague, Vladimir Karpenko once talked me into writing about my visits to Russia. The story was published in a volume produced for an anniversary of their institute. However, rather than write about my adventures in smoke alley[3] in Tokyo or at the Great Alaska Bush Company in Anchorage or looking for antiques in Seoul, I want to write about the importance of the science that is conducted and exchanged within NPAFC. Government supported science is expensive. However, the answers that we all need to manage Pacific salmon into the future can only be produced with government support because

of the costs of ships and the need for stability of the work force and in the worksites. A famous Canadian oceanographer used to say that we go to sea to see. Russian and Japanese researchers learned this years ago and we all benefit from their efforts. I think that it is time for an International Year of the Salmon. I think that we are close to discovering the theory of the natural regulation of Pacific salmon populations. Ships, satellites, DNA and special tags provide the technologies that teams of scientists can use to piece together the processes that regulate the abundances of all major species of Pacific salmon. Once one country steps up to lead the project, I think everyone will become involved. I also think that there are dozens of groups that will join the initiative as sponsors. An added bonus is that politicians and agencies most likely will see their popularity increase. Not all of the parts of the scientific puzzle are on the table, but the missing pieces can be found with a focused effort by all countries. The resulting economic benefits are important to all countries. The social benefits are probably even more important as salmon are icons of ecosystem health and good management.

I would like to be able to follow the future research on salmon more as an observer than a participant. I could, however, help organize the International Year of the Salmon. I hope that Canada plays a lead role in developing the International Year of the Salmon. However, if Canada is not able to lead the parade, then perhaps one of the other four countries can help. Sooner or later we will understand how salmon populations are regulated. With strong leadership through NPAFC, I think that it will be sooner. Bill Ricker used to say that everything is simple once it is discovered. I think it will not be too long when students will look back and wonder why it took so long to understand the simple processes that control salmon populations.

Editor's Notes

[1] International North Pacific Fisheries Commission (INPFC) was the "predecessor" organization of NPAFC.

[2] According to the INPFC Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Meeting, Dick's first meeting was in 1976.

[3] Area under the railway where billowing smoke is generated by yakitori stands grilling chicken.

Dick Beamish
NPAFC Science Sub-Committee Chairperson

Dr. Richard (Dick) Beamish was born in Toronto, graduated with a PhD from University of Toronto, and completed his post-doctoral studies at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. His career with Fisheries and Oceans Canada started at the Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg, and by the mid-1970s he moved the Pacific Biological Station (PBS) in Nanaimo. While at PBS, Dick was Head of the Groundfish Section (1977-1979) and led the station as its Director (1980-1992). He has received many awards for scientific achievement including the Order of Canada, in recognition for discovery of acid rain, and the Order of British Columbia, for discovering some Pacific fish species can live to be very old. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and recently became the first foreign scientist named as an honorary member the Pacific Research Fisheries Center (TINRO-Center) in Vladivostok. In 2008 Dick was awarded the Demel Medal by the Sea Fisheries Institute in Gdynia for scientific achievement and popularizing knowledge of marine ecology and fisheries.

Dick is an Editor for Transactions of the American Fisheries Society, a member of numerous scientific panels and management boards, a Professor at Vancouver Island University, and President of the American Institute of Fisheries Research Biologists. Dick's research publications have included pioneering works on climate regimes, regime shifts, and the effects of climate on fish populations. He has identified a new species of freshwater fish in British Columbia and studied its evolutionary relationships. In May 2011 Dick retired from PBS where he will continue as Emeritus Scientist and be involved in fisheries research. His plans include more free time for his numerous hobbies including enjoyment of his garden of rare and spectacular rhododendrons.