

To: Sonora Morin Thompson, Executive Director IMAWG

From: Anita Blakley, Senior Fisheries Biologist and Jessica Johnson MacKinnon, Senior Aquatic Biologist LGL Limited

Date: 20 March 2025

RE: End of Project Report for Vancouver Island Salmon Committee and Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative Communication Tables

1 Introduction

IMAWG (Island Marine Aquatic Working Group) consists of 15 member First Nations from the three language areas on Vancouver Island: Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw. These areas encompass all First Nations on Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland and up to the Central Coast. IMAWG works strategically to advance Indigenous fisheries in relation to policy, traditional ecological knowledge, modern science, habitat, stewardship, protection, and management. In 2022, IMAWG was awarded funding under British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF) to develop a Vancouver Island Salmon Committee (VISC).

Since the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI) introduction in 2021, IMAWG members have been providing feedback to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) that conservation and rebuilding of salmon is the greatest priority. To improve communication and collaboration further, IMAWG was awarded PSSI funding to create a new 'PSSI Communications Coordinator and Communications Table' through VISC. Starting in January through to March 2024, VISC and PSSI initiated early engagement with preparation of a collaborative hybrid one-day workshop that was held on 15 March 2024 at the Tigh-na-mara Resort in Parksville, BC. Additional funding was secured in October 2024 to continue the ongoing engagement until March 2025. The second phase of engagement included a monthly series of virtual meetings starting December 2024 and culminating in an in-person workshop held at the Snuneymuxw Wellness Centre on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation March 2025.

To fulfill the main goal of this new initiative, the technical expertise of VISC was leveraged to build a network of Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM) and relevant DFO PSSI staff. This collaborative network is designed to share information specifically on Vancouver Island PSSI initiatives, focusing on South Coast area implementation. Through this exchange of information, relevant DFO PSSI staff and Vancouver Island AAROM members would have a Tier 2 technical environment to share:

- what activities are being worked on,
- where more engagement or work needs to be done,
- receive feedback on potential projects,
- and gather advice on regional activities.

2 Summary of 2024/2025 VISC-DFO PSSI Workshop Participants

The workshops were facilitated by Anita Blakley (Senior Fisheries Biologist from LGL Limited and VISC technical lead) and Jessica Johnson-Mackinnon (Senior Aquatic Biologist from LGL Limited), with Sonora Morin Thompson (Executive Director of IMAWG), Andrea Goruk (Senior PSSI Implementation Advisor), Stacey Larsen (PSSI Implementation Advisor), and Sunny Mizushima (PSSI Implementation Advisor).

Participants (on average ~25) that attended were from:

- A-Tlegay Fisheries Society
- Q’ul-Ihanumtsun Aquatic Resources Society (QARS)
- Cowichan Tribes
- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Uu-athluk
- Da’naxda’xw
- Halalt First Nation
- Huu-ay-aht First Nation
- Nuu-chah-nulth
- IMAWG
- Fraser Salmon Management Council (FSMC)
- First Nation Fisheries Council (FNFC)
- Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance (LFFA)
- Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA)
- DFO (including PSSI staff)
- LGL Limited (VISC technical team including LGL staff to support the presentations)

3 Engagement Record and Progress Updates to end of Project

The second phase of engagement included three monthly virtual workshops and one hybrid workshop where VISC PSSI engagements were coordinated and facilitated. The first kick-off planning meeting occurred November 2024 with both VISC and DFO members present. This meeting was to set the frequency and initial topic selections planned for the workshops. Workshops were planned to be a monthly series of virtual meetings starting December 2024 and culminating in an in-person workshop held at the Snuneymuxw Wellness Centre on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation March 2025 (Figure 1.0). Table 1.0 below summarizes the facilitation meeting dates and well as the formal workshop dates:

Table 1.0 Summary of project meeting dates for VISC and DFO PSSI committees.

Component	November 2024	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025
Project Facilitation (Planning Group)	Nov 7	Dec 3, 11	Jan 6, 13, 21	Feb 3, 12, 24	Mar 5, 21	
VISC- DFO PSSI Workshops (Tier 2)		Dec 17	Jan 24	Feb 5	Mar 7	
VISC Table (Tier 1)	Nov 15					Apr 17

A



B



Figure 1. Workshop participants engaging in A) round table discussions at the Snuneymuxw Wellness Centre and B) Salmon cookout on Saysutshun Island hosted by Snuneymuxw First Nations.

4 Key Deliverables

The following bullets outline the key tasks and deliverables undertaken as part of the project:

- Prepared a 4-month workplan based on the outcomes listed in section 1 and requested feedback from both PSSSI and VISC (link to [Workplan](#)).
- Organized and facilitated four workshops that provided updates on local activities and regional initiatives to increase knowledge, capacity and opportunities for rebuilding local salmon systems:
 1. **VISC-DFO PSSSI Communication Table held virtually, 17 December 2024.** IMAWG members were invited along with representatives from DFO, LFFA, UFFA and FSMC. With presentations from: Andrea Goruk (DFO), David Willis (DFO), Kali Brauckmann (Snuneymuxw), Jim Meldrum (DFO), Claire Menendez (DFO), Sabrina Crowley (NTC) and Anita Blakley (LGL). December 17th [Meeting Notes](#).
 2. **VISC-PSSSI Communication Table held virtually 24 January 2025.** IMAWG members were invited along with representatives from DFO, FSMC, LGL and LFFA. With presentations from: Andrea Goruk

- (DFO), Shane Peterson (DFO), Karl English (LGL), Derek Leboeuf (A-Tlegay), Karen Ballentyne (DFO), and Anita Blakley (LGL). January 24th [Meeting Notes](#)
3. **VISC-PSSI Communication Table held virtually 5 February 2025.** IMAWG members were invited along with representatives from DFO, FSMC, LFFA, and FNFC. With presentations from: Andrea Goruk (DFO), Shane Peterson (DFO), Declan Embury (DFO), Stu Barnes (FNFC), Lynda Ritchie (DFO), Jenna Sutherst (DFO), and Anita Blakley (LGL). February 5th [Meeting Notes](#).
 4. **VISC-PSSI Communication Table held virtually and in person 7 March 2025.** IMAWG members were invited along with representatives from DFO, FSMC and LFFA. The workshop was held in the morning (9am-1:00pm) followed by a Salmon cook-out hosted by Snuneymuxw First Nation (John White). The meeting included a welcome by Elder Sandra Good (Shxuysulwut), and presentations by Nicole Fredrickson (IMAWG), Andrea Goruk (DFO), Cory Lagasse (DFO), Pieter VanWill (DFO), Melissa Nottingham (DFO), Amelia Vos (HFN), Cheri Ayers (BioAyer Consultants) and Anita Blakley (LGL). March 7th [Meeting Notes](#).

5 Project Recommendations

Draft recommendations from the VISC-DFO PSSI table were reviewed with meeting participants at the 7 March workshop:

- ✓ **Create Public Educational Materials:** Establish a centralized repository for sharing lessons learned and best practices. (For example, educating the public on selective fishing practices).
- ✓ **Engage Indigenous Communities:** Leverage their growing capacity in science and management to ensure project continuity and advocacy.
- ✓ **Strengthen First Nation Organizational Capacity:** Address staffing challenges, ensure longevity, and transition from “survival mode” to long-term sustainability.
- ✓ **Develop a Clear Project Process Document:** Streamline workflows and guide partners through complex project checklists. (For example, highlighting the permitting process for various projects).
- ✓ **Develop a Roadmap for Currently Funded DFO Projects:** Provide clear next steps, supported by collective recommendations and proposals.
- ✓ **Align with Federal and Provincial Priorities:** Leverage the “salmon recovery economy” to secure sustained funding and program support through regular check-ins with the Trilateral Salmon Accord Steering Committee.
- ✓ **Increase DFO Collaboration & Policy Reform:** Develop mechanisms for transparency, co-authored policy memos, and Nation-driven policy changes. (create a way for Nations facing the same problems to come together with DFO to reform policy).
- ✓ **Enhance Provincial Involvement:** Encourage stronger collaboration, particularly in habitat issues and the Trilateral Accord, to advance cooperative efforts.
- ✓ **Ensure Long-Term, Predictable Funding:** Advocate for funding stability beyond short-term government cycles (funding stability beyond a typical government cycle).
- ✓ **Secure Funding for continuation of VISC-PSSI DFO Communications Table:** prepare workplan for 2025-2026 fiscal year.
- ✓ **Evaluation Process:** incorporate a collaborative evaluation process with First Nations and DFO. The process would serve as a “report card” on the use of PSSI funding and the progress of associated projects.

Next Steps include:

- Final debrief meeting with VISC-DFO PSSI planning committee (held 21 March);
- Prepare a draft proposal/workplan for continued funding for the VSC-DFO PSSI table (by 10 April);
- Prepare project infographic for posting on IMWAG website;
- Debrief with VISC members on 17 April to confirm the above recommendations and review proposal for continued funding; and
- Submit a letter of agreed upon recommendations to South Coast Area Director by April 2025;

DRAFT