

Fishing agreement does not take sustainability into account

Editor:

People like the mayor of Owen Sound have indicated that they support the MNR-SON fishing agreement. Some say they have read and understand it.

If these people really are experts on the agreement, maybe they can explain the following points brought forward in this letter. Better yet, maybe the MNR or SON can explain them.

Just how can you have a sustainable commercial fishery with year-round fishing, with absolutely no protection during the spawning period? I'm referring specifically to whitefish and lake trout. This agreement mentions absolutely nothing about protecting this resource. I'm not a biologist, but would it not be wise to close down the commercial fishery from October to the end of December, to allow whitefish and lake trout to spawn?

As a sport fishermen, I have to

obey a closed season for lake trout, again to eliminate their harvest during the fall spawning season. Whitefish on the other hand is open to angling, but this species is not a high priority for most anglers at this time of year.

Sports fishermen are using one line with a single hook, so the few fish taken wouldn't have an impact. Using a gill net at this time of year is another matter.

In the fishing agreement there is no mention of a quota for lake trout. There's not one word about protecting a species that the MNR is desperately trying to re-establish in our waters. The lake trout program in southwestern Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, with trout reared at the Chatsworth fish hatchery which Ontario taxpayers fund, is one of the most extensive fisheries programs in North America.

This trout recovery program is in serious trouble due to commercial gill net fishing. Whitefish

too are being over-exploited. In data from the MNR in QMA [quota management area] 5.3 in Georgian Bay for an 11-year period, [1995-2005] the quota for lake trout was exceeded every year. Four times, the quota was exceeded by an astounding 1,000%, the highest was 1,236%.

In QMA 5.6 [Georgian Bay] for an 11-year period [1995-2005], the quota was again exceeded every year for lake trout, the highest being 1,042%. In this same QMA from 1995 to 2002, in all but one year, the quota for whitefish was exceeded.

In QMA 5.8 [Georgian Bay] for a 15-year period [1995 to 2009], the quota was exceeded 13 times for whitefish. In the same QMA, the quota for lake trout was exceeded, again every year.

Is the same situation happening in Lake Huron as well?

In most QMAs, some incidental catch of salmonids is reported, but none are reported

in the waters surrounding the Bruce Peninsula. This is hard to believe, no salmonid harvest at all.

Would the commercial fishermen really have us believe that chinook salmon, rainbow trout and brown trout are pre-conditioned to avoid strangulation in gill nets?

Why should taxpayers' money be wasted on raising and stocking lake trout, to establish the once top predator only to make it a put and take gill net fishery. That's what we have in southwestern Georgian Bay, a put and take gill net fishery.

Back to whitefish, with year round fishing are they being netted during the spawning season and why? Do the fishermen have a market for whitefish roe [eggs]? All sport fishermen know that spawning fish do not make good table fare. Are whitefish any different?

Under 4.9 of the fishing agree-

ment, if no total allowable catch has been set for a species, there is no limit on the weight of that species that may be caught. To me this says that sports fish such as salmon, rainbow and brown trout can be harvested at will.

I, as a life-long sport fishermen, have to obey MNR rules and regulations which afford some protection to the species or risk fines and even confiscation of fishing equipment. More enforcement is needed by the MNR and the SON themselves. The SON not only have their own enforcement but also their own bylaws to regulate the commercial fishermen. How often are these bylaws enforced?

Two court cases affirmed the rights of the SON to fish commercially in their territory waters, but did it say anything about abusing the fishery? In my opinion, fishing for food, social and ceremonial purposes is just another way of abusing the

resource. Thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of pounds of fish, can be taken for this purpose only to be sold on the open market.

In my opinion, species of fish the sportsmen stock and prize have or will affect the whitefish population. If this was the case, it should have happened by now. Let's look at the real threat — overfishing.

The last question is who really does benefit from the commercial fishery? Sure, there's the occasional community fish fry. But it's the fishermen and a few employees. Is there anything in it for the rest of their communities?

Remember, sustainable fishing means just that. And those that are so informed, give the fishing agreement another read.

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