

# Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

6730 Martin Way E., Olympia, Washington 98516-5540  
Phone (360) 438-1180

[www.nwifc.org](http://www.nwifc.org)

FAX # 753-8659

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Mr. Don Kowal  
Executive Secretary  
Pacific Salmon Commission  
600 – 1155 Robson Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 1B5

**RE: Pacific Salmon Commission – Final Report of the Expert Panel regarding the Coded Wire Tag Program**

Dear Mr. Kowal 

We would like to express our thanks to Dr. Hankin and the other members of the Expert Panel for their detailed and thorough review of the Coded Wire Tag (CWT) Program. The western Washington Tribes appreciate the effort that they put into examining the CWT Program, the challenges it faces, the new and emerging technologies that are available, and their recommendations to the Commission and its participating entities.

It is now incumbent upon the Commission and its participating entities to give serious consideration to each of the recommendations from the Expert Panel. Our hope is that an action plan to do just that can be developed and adopted by the Commission before the end of the upcoming meeting cycle.

The CWT program has provided a practical, efficient and cost-effective means for stock- and fishery-specific assessments. The Pacific Salmon Commission's management regimes for chinook and coho salmon rely extensively on data from this program. We concur with the Expert Panel's findings that there has been degradation to the coastwide program. It is time for all the involved entities to re-affirm their commitment to the CWT Program and undertake an in-depth review of the procedures and methods involved in collecting and reporting CWT data. The quality and reliability of the data collected within this program must be improved as it will remain the primary stock assessment tool for at least the next 5-10 years, regardless of advancements in other technologies.

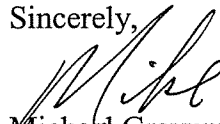
A renewed commitment to the CWT Program must also translate into cooperative action to address issues presented by mass marking and mark-selective fishing. We share the same concerns as the Expert Panel regarding impacts from these activities on the CWT Program. The Panel's recommendations regarding mass-marking and mark-selective fisheries should serve as the starting point for Commission deliberations. Collectively, as responsible fishery managers, we must begin to explicitly consider the uncertainty

stemming from these activities in the development of our harvest management plans. An action plan must be developed that includes an approach that links marking, tagging and analytical methods to the anticipated intensity of mark-selective fisheries.

The Expert Panel's recommendations for a coordinated research and implementation plan contain a variety of viable options for alternate technologies. These options will need to be weighed carefully as research funds are limited. This is the one section within the report that caused us concern. We do not dispute the potential benefits that Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) markers may hold for future salmon research. However, we do believe there has been a general overstatement of the current state of the art with regard to SNPs as apposed to microsatellites. Substantial advancement with the technology will need to occur before SNP assays will be able to identify closely affiliated natural populations. Even though mircosatellite technology has been employed for time now, this technology is still not able to identify these closely affiliated populations. While we are not vested in either technology, the Panel should clarify the current capability of each approach.

In summary, we agree with the Expert Panel that the CWT program needs a tune-up. We are supportive of their recommendations and schedule of implementation steps to accomplish this important task. We remain committed to the CWT Program and look forward to working with the Commission and its participating entities on developing an action plan to accomplish this task.

Sincerely,



Michael Grayum  
Executive Director