**Tseshaht First Nation Economic Opportunity (EO) fisheries agreement**

**Briefing Note**

**August 26, 2020**

**Prepared for:**

Supporters of the Tseshaht First Nation

**Title:**

Request for DFO Minister and Deputy Minister to direct DFO Regional Staff to sign Economic Opportunities fisheries agreement with Tseshaht First Nation

**Background:**

The Tseshaht First Nation is located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island and have over 1300 members with approximately 300 Tseshaht boats participating in our local Economic Opportunity fishery.

Recently the Tseshaht First Nation was attempting to sign our annual Economic Opportunity fisheries agreement for various salmon species. However, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans regional staff have issues with some of Tseshaht’s Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) sockeye fishery earlier this year and therefore have indicated they will not sign an agreement with Tseshaht this year. Tseshaht has already signed the agreement and sent it to DFO and are awaiting DFO’s signature.

The chinook fishery currently occurring can help bring more than over $1 million into the local economy and support Tseshaht families. Many fishers have already participated in federal COVID-19 relief support programs for fisheries and businesses, without an agreement they may not be able to pay back their financing.

**Purpose:**

To provide Tseshaht supporters with information on the current situation and what is required.

**Issue(s):**

1. **Signing of agreement**
	1. DFO has indicated to Tseshaht they will not sign an EO agreement for chinook this year due to concerns about the earlier sockeye fishery.
2. **Impacts to families**
	1. Up to 300 Tseshaht individual fishers will be impacted as well as their families, children, and businesses. At a time of economic uncertainty due to COVID-19 Tseshaht citizens are already dealing with significant social, emotional, spiritual, mental, physical, and now financial issues.
3. **Local/regional and individual Tseshaht fishers’ economic impacts**
	1. The local First Nation EO chinook fishery has the potential to bring in over $1 million into the local and regional economy. Local businesses in the Alberni Valley could also be negatively impacted.
	2. Tseshaht fishers, families and children will be significantly impacted financially due to the unwillingness of DFO to sign the EO agreement. Many Tseshaht fishers have participated in various federal COVID relief programs including fisheries and businesses in preparation for this fishery that occurs every year. Without an agreement many Tseshaht fishers may not be able to pay their upcoming COVID loans. Some of those are more than $40,000. This could be a PR disaster for the federal government.

**Current Status:**

1. **Signing of agreement**
	1. Tseshaht officials signed the agreement and sent it to DFO on Friday, August 21st, 2020 and have been verbally told by regional DFO staff that Canada/DFO will not sign an agreement this calendar year. Tseshaht has always abided by the rules to any agreement that they have signed.
2. **Impacts to families**
	1. Tseshaht families are already feeling the burden of no potential agreement and loss of revenue emotionally, spiritually and mentally as families are now scrambling on how they proceed as this fishery not only produces income for the year for families, but support for future EI opportunities and more.
3. **Local/regional and individual Tseshaht fishers’ economic impacts**
	1. Port Alberni and the general region has already been impacted negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic. As well, Tseshaht members rely on this fishery every year as a means of income for a moderate livelihood throughout the year. Some fishers also produce enough to support their EI claims in the future.
	2. Many Tseshaht members who applied for various supports are scrambling to determine how they will make their first upcoming payment.

**Key Considerations:**

1. This is a longstanding agreement which Tseshaht and DFO have signed jointly, each year, for some 26 years
2. Tseshaht members will be impacted negatively resulting in a huge financial burden
3. Relief programs Canada provided could result in disastrous public outcry for Canada when providing loans to fishers through one department, while another department within the same government refuses to sign an agreement which would help pay off the very same financing, loans or indigenous business relief it was intended to provide.

**Conclusion and/or Recommendations:**

1. That the DFO Minister or Deputy Minister directs regional DFO staff to sign the agreement Tseshaht has provided **before Tuesday, September 1st, 2020.**

For more information please contact:

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