

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



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September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Honourable Prime Minister Trudeau  
Via email: Justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

**RE: BC First Nations Leaders Call for Immediate Priority to Rebuild Pacific Salmon**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We urgently call on the federal government to create a mandate for immediate priority to rebuild collapsed Pacific salmon stock. The loss of Pacific salmon disproportionately impacts all First Nations in British Columbia, where salmon is an integral part of their societies and cultures since time immemorial. In an era centering on Reconciliation, the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration), and Nation-to-Nation relationships, the recovery of Pacific salmon stocks must be grounded by mutual respect and recognition of First Nations Title and Rights.

We anticipate the upcoming throne speech and hope that it will address our immediate request to prioritize the rebuilding of Pacific salmon stocks, in a manner that is consistent with the federal government's promise for a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples that prioritizes reconciliation, the UN Declaration and upholding Title and Rights.

The decline of Pacific salmon in British Columbia has been decades in the making, with the Cohen Commission report (2012) attributing the cause of decline to the impact of cumulative stressors including ocean temperature changes, climate change, overfishing, loss and degradation of habitat, diseases and pathogens via open net-pen fish farm operations, etc. It has been 10+ years since the Cohen Inquiry, yet Fraser sockeye numbers have only further declined to an estimated 283,000 return this year, another lowest return on record.

Cohen Commission report recommendations 18 and 19's implementation deadline of September 30, 2020 is fast approaching. Recent reports of Sea Lice infestation within the Discovery Island area and a significant peer reviewed published paper (<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/eap.2226>) identifying the "Under Reporting" by industry of Sea Lice counts leave us with very little confidence whatsoever that there is minimal risk to out migrating Juvenile Wild Salmon. Therefore, it is imperative Recommendations 18 & 19 be implemented.

Implementation of the *Wild Salmon Policy* has been slow and not yet resulted in tangible benefits for First Nations' rebuilding priorities and to Pacific salmon

stocks at large. While the new *Fisheries Act* provision to rebuild depleted fish stocks provides a stronger regulatory tool, questions remain on how the provision effectively applies to complex Pacific salmon stocks. In the *B.C. First Nations Coalition* response to the *Fisheries Act* legislative review, 130+ BC First Nations jointly recommended that the Purpose Section of the revised Act include language for restoration of fish and fish habitat and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This recommendation still holds true but has not yet been updated in relevant federal policies or implemented in fisheries management.

First Nations in BC have been at the forefront of calls to rebuild declining Pacific salmon stocks but on-the-ground actions have been hampered. There remains a lack of dedicated federal funding and resources to reciprocate and respond to First Nations requests and there remains a perceived unwillingness for necessary actions to change fisheries management. While funding programs such as the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund are positive contributions, many First Nations' rebuilding priorities remain unfunded and there lacks a coherent strategy to rebuilding Pacific salmon stocks. Federal action must start with a new approach to fisheries management. No longer can federal government manage fisheries based on the notion of abundance. The conservation and rebuilding of Pacific salmon must take priority and fisheries management must reflect the priority need to conserve and protect fish.

The Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and Canadian Coast Guards must be mandated to place urgent priority towards the rebuilding of Pacific salmon stocks. First Nations in BC have repeatedly called on the federal government to uphold their election promise and transition away from open net-pen fish farms by 2025. It is not sufficient to develop a plan and delay the actual transitions any longer. The federal mandate must be clear and re-emphasize a priority to remove these sources of diseases and pathogens along salmon migration routes.

Wild Salmon Forever has identified 101 First Nations who support the current federal government's commitment to the transition of open net cage Fish Farms to Land Based Closed Containment. Many of these First Nations have native wild salmon juveniles that migrate past the Fish Farms on the East Coast of Vancouver Island. Many, if not all, have never had opportunity to engage with the DFO concerning even the "potential" to harm their juvenile salmon. (<https://www.wildfirst.ca/fnsupport/>)

The federal government must recognize the urgent necessity and work with BC First Nations to implement a coherent strategy to rebuild collapsing Pacific salmon stocks. We also request that the new mandate for DFO be clear that the transition of open net-pen fish farms will be completed by 2025.

We appreciate you taking the time to review this letter and our recommendations while considering the priorities of Fisheries and Oceans Canada over the next several years.

Sincerely,  
**FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**

**On behalf of the FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT**



Cheryl Casimer



Robert Phillips



Lydia Hwitsum

**On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS**



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip



Chief Don Tom



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson

**On behalf of the BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:**



Regional Chief Terry Teegee

c.c. Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Fisheries  
Rebecca Reid, DFO RDG  
Tseshaht First Nation  
Honourable Gord Johns, M.P.  
First Nations Fisheries Council