

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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News Release

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Catastrophic Decline in Pacific Salmon will be Hastened by DFO Fish Farm Decision that Flouts Critical Cohen Recommendation

((Xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – September 30, 2020) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) is appalled and gravely concerned over the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO) decision regarding recommendation no.19 from the Cohen Commission. This recommendation set a deadline for September 30, 2020, for the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to prohibit net-pen farming in the Discovery Islands and address the risk farms like these pose to the health of migrating Fraser River Sockeye salmon. However, on September 28, 2020, the Minister made bleaker the future of our salmon; based on scientific assessments of nine pathogens associated with fish farms, the Minister concluded that open-net pen farms in the Discovery Islands pose a minimal risk to wild salmon.

"UBCIC is severely disappointed that today's deadline has not been met with progress, but with further evidence that the DFO continues to play accomplice to a fish farming industry that is pushing our salmon stocks closer to extinction," stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC. "The bottom line is that the Minister's decision is contrary to evidence submitted by biologists that sea lice from fish farms threaten the survival of wild salmon, and is contrary to the concerns of First Nations over the chemicals used to treat sea lice in fish farms and the turbulent waters in the Discovery Islands area that could spread sea lice for miles. How can the failure to implement the Cohen Commission's recommendation be justified when the DFO did not even test for sea lice in its assessments of various pathogens and diseases found on fish farms? How can the DFO justify its actions when the livelihoods, cultures, and rights of Indigenous peoples are a stake?"

"Although extremely disheartening, it should come as no surprise that the DFO remains disinclined to take action to address and remedy the effects on net-pen fish farming," stated Chief Don Tom, Vice-President of UBCIC. "At the heart of the matter is the DFO's conflict of interest that the Cohen

Commission previously red flagged – as long as the DFO both polices and promotes fish farming, the assured health and long-term sustainability of Pacific salmon will be a pipe dream. The DFO's pro-industry bias will continue to result in the prioritization of fish farm interests over the survival of wild salmon. Change needs to happen; the open-net pen fish farm model is simply not compatible with the principles of conservation and sustainability.”

“The DFO’s decision not to implement the Cohen Commission’s no.19 recommendation does not bode well for the future of Pacific salmon. Salmon stocks in BC have been decimated by climate change, the devastating Big Bar slide, and years of systemic mismanagement; our salmon cannot afford another blow” stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of UBCIC. “Significantly, the DFO failed to adequately consult First Nations in the development of its assessments of pathogens on fish farms, including failing to engage First Nations when determining the acceptable levels of risk of these pathogens to wild salmon. As First Nations derive vital social, cultural, and economic benefits from salmon, and enjoy the constitutionally protected right to fish for food, social, and ceremonial purposes, Canada cannot afford to exclude us from crucial decision-making processes.”

“Over the years, UBCIC has exercised a strong mandate around advancing Indigenous fishing rights and protecting wild salmon, repeatedly impressing upon BC and Canada the urgency of the salmon crisis at hand,” concluded Chief Dalton Silver, Fisheries Representative for UBCIC.

“Through UBCIC Resolutions 2012-19, 2012-65, 2016-40, and 2020-15, UBCIC has committed to working with First Nations to advocate for and support the recovery of wild salmon stocks. Issuing an urgent declaration of the collapse of the Pacific Sockeye stocks as part of the First Nations Leadership Council on August 18, 2020, UBCIC called upon the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to immediately intervene and issue an emergency order to close all fisheries on the Fraser River. Given the recent developments, UBCIC renews our call for the closure of pen-net farms and the transition to close-containment aquaculture on land, as well as the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and expertise to assist this shift.”

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca