



REPORT RELEASE: “*The reality is: Salmon farming is a path to self-determination and reconciliation for many First Nations in coastal BC*”

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A coalition of BC First Nations calls on the federal government to immediately re-issue salmon farming licences in their territories in 2022 to respect Indigenous rights and title. A new report highlights 276 jobs and \$50 million per year are injected into coastal Indigenous communities from salmon farming.

STATEMENT BY THE COALITION OF FIRST NATIONS FOR FINFISH STEWARDSHIP

COAST SALISH, KWAKWAKA’WAKW, TSIMSHIAN, AND NUU-CHAH-NULTH TERRITORIES – A coalition of First Nations leaders from coastal British Columbia has formed, united over a shared concern that our rights to make economic decisions for our territories are being ignored.

Currently the Government of Canada is reviewing whether to re-issue salmon farming licences in our territories, which are set to expire on June 30, 2022. Our coalition is opposed to the federal government disregarding science and bowing to unfounded activist claims on salmon farming that, if heeded, will severely damage our communities, and deny our rights and title. To protect these rights, our economic self-determination, and our members, our Nations call on the federal government to immediately re-issue salmon farming licences in our territories.

Re-issuance will give us time to further engage with our members on the positive transition and diversification of the salmon farming sector. This process should be led by First Nation governance, economic development, and environmental stewardship resulting in a tangible expression of reconciliation. This will support the goals and future wellbeing of our communities, without compromising the surrounding ecosystem and wild salmon.

Offering anything less than re-issuing licences flies in the face of the federal government’s commitment to reconciliation and the rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as their recent promise to support the participation of First Nations in the management of ocean resources.

DFO Minister Joyce Murray is listening to everyone but the Nations that will suffer the most if licences aren't renewed. To date, many of the chiefs and leaders in our coalition have reached out to the Minister and they have either been ignored or told that the Minister will go ahead with her agenda to transition farms out of the water in their territories, despite their concerns, and without their input or consent. This is not reconciliation.

True reconciliation would see individual Nations decide how the sector fits into their waters and communities as the original participants in the coastal, Blue Economy. Moving to land-based salmon farming is not an option for the majority of our Nations, and if this is forced by government, our communities will lose the sector and all the benefits that come with it. We will suffer. Many will return to poverty and as the leaders and protectors of our Nations, we cannot allow that to happen.

A survey of our producer partners and major suppliers to the industry indicates that the direct combined primary economic benefits to First Nations in coastal BC are \$50 million annually in the form of:

- more than 276 full-time, meaningful jobs,
- benefit sharing,
- contracts with Indigenous-owned companies that provide further employment.

These numbers multiply when the impact of indirect and induced economic activity are factored in. Employment in the sector is often more than a 'job' for our people and represents a career where Indigenous individuals can advance without leaving their communities. Providing year-round employment in impoverished, often remote areas has the double benefit of lifting entire families away from dependence on social assistance. As our relationships with the farmed salmon sector continue to strengthen and diversify, the ability to keep these jobs and economic benefits within our communities will only increase.

Salmon farming has lifted entire coastal Indigenous communities out of poverty. It injects money into our communities, creates meaningful employment for our members, provides opportunities for First Nations-owned business to supply the sector, and funds projects that contribute to the wellness of our people and wild salmon.

As coastal Nations, wild salmon are our priority, and we would not put centuries of stewardship at risk for short-term gains. Participating Nations of this coalition recognize science shows that responsible salmon farming does not adversely impact wild salmon. Companies are held accountable for their actions, and we ensure they are committed to the constant improvement of their practices through technology and innovation.

The ongoing development of relationships with the sector has seen First Nations taking on governance roles that have resulted in oversight of salmon farming within their traditional

territories, which is true reconciliation in action. In some cases, many of our Nations are already conducting oversight of these salmon farms in our territories with environmental monitoring and Guardian programs.

By managing the waters and its resources which we have overseen for millennia, coastal First Nations are positioned to lead Canada's Blue Economy, encourage new investment and innovation, create good jobs for our members, and work together to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Our coalition is calling on the federal government to recognize our rights and title in managing marine resources in our territories and re-issue salmon farming licences in 2022.

Re-issuing these licences with a minimum five-year term gives us time to properly engage with our members, government, and with the sector on 2025 aquaculture transition plans. There must be room for each plan to be unique and tailored to individual Nations' values, socio-economic priorities, regional characteristics, and environmental conditions.

We expect these transition plans to respect each Nation's asserted governance model and the true spirit of reconciliation; to represent our autonomous yet connected voices; to respect our rights and title; and to deliver positive outcomes for our communities, for our territories' unique ecosystems, and for all of coastal British Columbia.

Key facts:

- Many Canadians have been led to believe that all BC First Nations are actively opposed to salmon farming, but the reality is otherwise.
- Seventeen First Nations have a variety of agreements and business arrangements with finfish aquaculture companies with the longest going back over two decades.
- These 17 Nations make up much of the south coast of British Columbia, with supply lines in the Fraser Valley, processing plants on the Lower Mainland, and transport contracts across BC.
- Moving to land-based farming in their territories is not geographically nor financially possible for many of these Nations; if forced onto land, these communities will lose salmon farming completely.
- The direct economic benefits to First Nations in coastal BC exceed \$50 million annually through more than 276 full time jobs, benefit payments, and contracts with indigenous-owned companies who provide further employment to First Nations communities
- In total, when indirect and induced economic activity is factored in, First Nation interests in BC's farmed salmon sector on and off reserves are estimated to generate \$83.3 million in economic activity, \$47.8 million in GDP, and 707 jobs earning \$36.6 million in wages per year.

Quotes:

Dallas Smith, spokesperson for FNFFS, Tlowitsis Nation

“As stewards of the coast for millennia, BC’s First Nations are positioned to lead Canada’s Blue Economy, but that potential can only be realized when Nations have the support, and the right, to carve out their own unique paths to economic self-determination. This applies to Nations that wish to pursue salmon farming. The leaders of this coalition understand that what works for one Nation might not work for another, and we respect that each Nation, as Rightsholders, can decide for themselves what the transition of salmon farming means to them. How the sector will be managed and overseen in each territory will look as unique as the Nations themselves.”

Chief Chris Roberts, Wei Wai Kum First Nation

“The Wei Wai Kum First Nation is engaged in a variety of successful economic development projects as a means of creating employment opportunities for our members, generating revenues to support Band programs, and contributing to the economy of the Campbell River region. For us as a Nation, and as part of the Laich-Kwil-Tach speaking Nations, this is about more than just the future of fisheries within our territory. This is about acknowledging the sovereign rights we hold over our territory and our ability to govern our territory.”

Hasheukumiss, Richard George, son of Tyee Hawiuh, Ahousaht First Nation

“Cermaq Canada operates in our territory under the Ahousaht Protocol Agreement. Respect and recognition of Ahousaht governance, Territory, and position as a Rightsholder is central to the Protocol. This protocol agreement covers a wide range of topics including environmental stewardship, employment, operating and communication standards, benefit sharing arrangements, and wild salmon projects. Cermaq has done more for wild salmon conservation and restoration in our territory than the Federal or Provincial Governments combined.”

Deputy Chief Councillor Chris McKnight, Kitsoo Xai’xais Nation

“Kitsoo Xai’xais has not only embraced salmon farming for decades but has carefully controlled its development and monitors potential impacts to the environment throughout the year. Kitsoo owns all of the salmon farm tenures and has strict operating protocols with Mowi. The authority of our Nation must be acknowledged and included in decisions that impact our rights to self-determination, self-government and resource management. Self-determination will only be meaningful with an adequate economic base, and with recognition of our governance jurisdiction.”

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