



## **GWA'SALA - 'NAKWAXDA'XW NATION**

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### **Federal aquaculture licensing decision disappoints but does not deter Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation in pursuing sustainable aquaculture**

Port Hardy, B.C. This week's decision by federal Fisheries Minister Joyce Murray to renew salmon aquaculture licenses in Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation (GNN) territory for two-year terms fails to consider Nation's rights, their economic stability, and the government's own reconciliation agenda.

"Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation is firm: we have authority to make decisions across our own traditional territory, as do other Nations," says Chief Terry Walkus. "Ottawa's decision tells us it is more concerned about virtue-signalling than actually seeking reconciliation with Indigenous Nations."

Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation announced in a live-streamed public event on March 25th that they would take over fisheries and aquaculture licensing. Both Hereditary and Elected Leaders of the Nation stood and acknowledged the traditional lands of the Kwakiutl Nation and recognized the shared lands and responsibilities with their neighbouring Kwakwaka'wakw relations. The Leaders spoke about shared commitments to restore wild salmon populations in their local watersheds and the need for Indigenous authority to govern aquaculture permitting in their territories.

While the Nation was prepared to issue permits in the absence of any license term renewal, they are dismayed with the decision for a two-year license renewal because it is too short a timeframe to justify the significant investment in innovation technology that the Minister has indicated is necessary to address her concerns.

"If the Canadian government cannot enable a policy climate for new research and technology in the industry, then companies have no incentive to stay and invest in BC's infrastructure, and many First Nations stand to lose not just revenue and business, but a viable livelihood that supports connection to our lands and waters," says Chief Walkus. The term 'transition' refers to technological change, but GNN also believes transition should refer to social innovation and recognition for a new governance as well. "Nations are ready to lead the industry into the future, and we would like to see the Canadian government recognize our co-jurisdictional authority and support our visions of what aquaculture could be."



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Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation is invoking their rights and traditional protocols as they create a new standard for aquaculture industry operations that exceeds the current federal regulation. Already the Nation has been monitoring its farms with greater presence and oversight than the government has had in place for the last 30 years.

“We are on a path to justice through exercising our rights and responsibilities over our lands and waters, and assuming responsibility for the health and well-being of our people,” says Chief Walkus. “We continue to wait for DFO to come to Port Hardy and consult directly on a Nation to Nation basis. In the meantime, the costs of these lost opportunities are adding-up, and the Nation will ensure that these problems and costs are well known to decision-makers in Ottawa.”

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