

THE REALITY IS:

Salmon Farming is a path to self
determination and reconciliation for
many First Nations in coastal BC.

—
March 2022

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COALITION OF FIRST NATIONS
FOR FINFISH STEWARDSHIP
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SUMMARY



Summary

The coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship (FNFFS) has united over a shared concern that their rights to make economic decisions for their territories are being ignored. These Nations call on the Federal Government to immediately reissue the salmon farming licences in their territories.

This will allow time for First Nations to further engage with stakeholders on the positive transition and diversification of the sector. What 'transition' means is not yet clear, but what is clear, is there must be room for each transition plan to be unique and tailored to individual Nations' values, socio-economic priorities, and regional characteristics. Due to rapidly changing climatic conditions, each Nation's plan will be distinctive in its environmental stewardship and food security approaches.

The primary economic benefits from salmon farming to First Nations in coastal BC are \$50 million. These include 276 full-time jobs, benefit payments, and contracts with Indigenous-owned companies that 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.

Leaders in this coalition have seen and experienced the devastation that poverty can have in their communities, with high unemployment, addiction, and suicide. Having long-term economic opportunities (like current agreements with salmon farming companies) that the Nations manage is the foundation for the renewal of their communities.

Salmon farming has lifted entire coastal Indigenous communities out of poverty, creating meaningful, year-round jobs for Indigenous peoples, providing opportunities for First Nations-owned business to supply the sector, and funding projects that increase the health and resilience of communities, as well as wild salmon. In addition to socio-economic benefits, the ongoing development of relationships with the sector has seen First Nations taking on governance and oversight roles within their traditional territories, which is true reconciliation in action.

This coalition calls on the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to reissue the operating licences of salmon farms in their territories in 2022, with a length of term that supports business and investor confidence, so that these Nations, government, and the sector can build successful, inclusive, and respectful transition plans for Nations by 2025. These renewals will also clear the path for the Province of British Columbia to renew the tenures on which the farms operate.

Case Study

– Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw Nation

The Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw Nation of Port Hardy has a vast territory on the South Central Coast of British Columbia and in the Great Bear Rainforest. For thousands of years, the abundance of marine and water resources has sustained both the Gwa’sala and Nakwaxda’xw. The result is a rich identity and culture that continues to be embodied and practiced in the community through ceremony and kin relations.

The Nation has had to rebuild their community since being relocated from traditional villages in the 1960s. The connection to their homelands continues to drive their development in the Blue Economy. They were always ocean peoples, and now they have established themselves in the North Vancouver Island economy beyond the traditional fishing and forestry sectors. This includes the tourism industry with their Indigenous boutique hotel and two restaurants and housing, construction management, financial and IT services. They have started a shellfish aquaculture farm in their traditional homelands, growing their own GwiGwi Pacific oyster.

K’awat’si Marine Services division is the Nation’s flagship company. It is managed by one of the Nation’s own Band members and is now one of the Nation’s biggest employers. K’awat’si Marine Services investments into marine transport infrastructure serve the BC coast from the ports of Vancouver and up to Klemtu on the North Central Coast, providing critical services for the fisheries and aquaculture community.

The Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw asserts their sovereign rights and responsibilities of stewardship over their Traditional Territory. Rural communities and their citizens need access to good jobs in order to stay and support British Columbia and Canada in supplying healthy seafood to a growing world population. The Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw Nation people are committed to creating and sharing a prosperous future for themselves and for their local rural communities. This is what reconciliation looks like. It’s happening in communities like Port Hardy, making the future look hopeful.

The GNN has hired community member Ethan Shaw as their Salmon Farm Monitor. His role is to learn all the operations of the farms and ensure that any concerns of the community are addressed and work towards a framework for implementing the Nation’s traditional knowledge along with current scientific monitoring practices already in existence.

“This is an opportunity for us to study the impacts of the farms and ensure that our fish, shellfish, seaweed and all other life remain healthy so that we have food for our community on a regular basis. Our Elders miss our traditional foods that they can no longer eat because of various rules and laws and because there’s not enough of these stocks anymore. We are working towards sustainability of both fisheries and aquaculture: they can both exist in our waters, but it should be our community that decides what that looks like for our Traditional Territory.”

– Ethan Shaw



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BACKGROUND



Background

Many Canadians have been led to believe that all BC First Nations are actively opposed to salmon farming, but this is not the reality. Seventeen First Nations have a variety of relationship agreements with finfish aquaculture companies, with the longest going back over two decades. Altogether, these Nations' territories make up most of the south coast of British Columbia.

In the sector's early days, the provincial and federal governments permitted salmon farming companies to choose sites without consulting the First Nations in whose territory the farms were operating. Today this is not an acceptable approach for all parties and is not practiced. While not all First Nations are fully in support of aquaculture in 2022, many Nations and producer companies are on a journey of reconciliation and are in the midst of developing a range of relationships that recognize the rights and title of First Nations in the coastal environment on their own terms.

In December of 2020, the previous Fisheries Minister, Bernadette Jordan, went against the science-based advice of her own department and cancelled the licenses of 19 salmon farms in the Discovery Islands. Some Nations in this region felt they were not properly consulted by the government on this decision, despite the Minister's claims. Now the current Fisheries Minister, Joyce Murray, is considering whether to reissue the remaining 79 salmon farming licences in BC by June of 2022; however, the input and concerns of leaders in this coalition have so far either been ignored by Minister Murray, or dismissed, on this issue. Consultation has not happened with the Nations that will suffer the most if these licences are not reissued. This is not reconciliation.

Should the farm licences be reissued, the Minister is mandated to work with First Nations, the sector, and other stakeholders, to develop a responsible plan to transition from open net-pen salmon farming in coastal British Columbia waters by 2025. Many interpret this as the transfer of all salmon farms out of the ocean by 2025, which contradicts the intent shared with the previous Fisheries Minister, Bernadette Jordan. Moving to land-based salmon farming is not an option for the majority of coastal Nations, and if this is forced by government, communities will lose the sector and all the benefits that come with it. Many will return to poverty and the social wellbeing of members will be damaged.

Some Nations in this coalition have completed feasibility studies on land-based salmon farming in their territories for many years, and they came to the same result: it is not possible, and if it was, they would have moved to land-based salmon farming years ago. If mandated to move the farms to land, these Nations will simply lose the sector.

What 'transition' means to the federal government is not yet clear, but what is clear, is there must be room for each transition plan to be unique and tailored to individual Nations' values, socio-economic priorities, and regional characteristics. Due to rapidly changing climatic and oceans conditions, each Nation's plan will be distinctive in its environmental stewardship and food security approaches.

Any transition plans must be built on the true intent of reconciliation; must represent the Nations' autonomous yet connected voices; respect rights and title; and deliver positive outcomes for Indigenous communities and their territories' unique ecosystems.



Case Study

– Wei Wai Kum

Starting in February 2020, the Wei Wai Kum (Campbell River Indian Band) implemented a Monitoring and Information Sharing (Guardian) Program Agreement (MISA) with Cermaq Canada for operations in the Discovery Islands.

The Wei Wai Kum First Nation gave serious consideration to the outcome of the Discovery Islands Decision in December of 2020 and took the step to negotiate directly with the salmon farming industry operating in their territory. Chief Roberts stated in a letter to the Minister that “Title belongs to Wei Wai Kum and we do take seriously our responsibility to govern our fisheries and be stewards of our lands.”

As a result of this discussion Cermaq Canada transferred the Licenses of Occupation to two facilities in the Discovery Islands to Wei Wai Kum and will be compensating Wei Wai Kum for fish harvested from the facilities.

Chief Roberts also said,

“Wei Wai Kum leadership wishes to embrace a process that advances reconciliation in respect of fisheries resources. We view this proposal, jointly submitted by Wei Wai Kum and Cermaq, as reconciliation in action as it builds on DFO’s recognition of our Indigenous Rights in our territory. The goal is to expand our Nation’s access to the commercial industry, including aquaculture, develop community fisheries, and create a mechanism for collaborative governance of fisheries resources.”



Arbitrary Decisions by the Federal Fisheries Minister Goes Against First Nations Rights, Title, and Reconciliation

The coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship (FNFFS) is deeply opposed to the Federal Government disregarding science and bowing to unfounded activist claims, discussing plans that could remove salmon farms from these Nations' territories. These actions are not respecting the rights and titles of First Nations, and go against the fundamental principles of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that the Federal Government has ascribed to through Bill C15, and the British Columbia Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA). This goes against the Federal Government's commitment to reconciliation and the rights of Indigenous peoples and their recent promise to support the participation of First Nations in the management of ocean resources, including fisheries and aquaculture.

The focus of UNDRIP and DRIPA is to support Indigenous self-government and Indigenous self-determination and to re-adjust the balance of power in recognition of justice and equality. Indigenous self-determination is the right to make decisions and enact First Nations' visions of culture, education, health, lands, resources, and economy.

This coalition notes that Canada is undertaking legislative reform to ensure laws are "consistent with the Declaration," and to include a non-derogation clause for "upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and not as abrogating or derogating from them (s.2(2))." The legislation reform recognizes the "substance of self-determination, self-government, culture, and ability to make decisions that affect them."¹ Further the federal government has stated that it,

"recognizes that reconciliation and self-government require a renewed fiscal relationship, developed in collaboration with Indigenous nations, that promotes a mutually supportive climate for economic partnership and resource development."

Leaders in this coalition have seen and experienced the devastation that poverty can have in their communities, with high unemployment, addiction, and suicide. Having long-term economic opportunities that are managed by the Nations is the foundation for the renewal of their communities. Salmon farming has provided opportunities for employment that has lifted entire coastal Indigenous communities out of poverty,

[1] Three-year timeline - December 3, 2020 - Bill C-15: "Canada must, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the Declaration."

provided opportunities for First Nations-owned business to supply the sector, and has funded projects that are increasing the health and resilience of communities.

First Nations want a rightful place in the economies of Canada and British Columbia. For many of the Nations in this coalition, salmon farming is how they can participate while lifting up their communities and their members. The ongoing development of relationships with the sector has seen First Nations taking on governance and oversight roles within their traditional territories, which is true reconciliation in action. As would be expected, these relationships are as varied as the companies and Nations participating in them;. They range from supply and service agreements to comprehensive and long-term protocol agreements, monitoring and oversight agreements, as well as highly developed commercial partnerships, which require multi-year investment strategies. In some instances, the Nation owns the marine finfish tenures and are landlords to the salmon farming company's operations. Some of these relationships are now generational, while others are still building momentum through dialogue and shared visions for the future.

Many of the agreements share a common thread of wild salmon conservation and restoration, partnership, and a commitment to increased innovation. Many agreement frameworks have been custom-built to create room for transition management and technological improvements.



Johnny Amos (far right) manages Creative Salmon's Baxter Islet farm site in Tofino Inlet in Tla-o-qui-aht traditional territory. Johnny, along with all his crew, live in the nearby Tla-o-qui-aht community of Ty-histanis. From left: Isiah David, Donovan Hayes, Sean Hayes, and Connor Yellowbird.

First Nations are Committed to Environmental Stewardship and Restoration in Their Territories

The protection of wild salmon is a priority for coastal First Nations, who would not put centuries of stewardship at risk for short-term gains. The oversight of farms in their territories and transparency from the sector are key to protecting wild salmon and the marine sources within their territories. In many cases where there are agreements with companies, Indigenous guardians monitor farm sites and independent biologists ensure that the production is done according to sustainable principles negotiated with companies. Companies are held accountable for their actions. As well, often at the request and direction of the Nations, producer companies are committing to constant improvement of their practices through technology and innovation.

Revenue from relationships with aquaculture are allowing First Nations to work on restoring wild salmon in the face of other stressors, like climate change, overfishing, and damage to watersheds. Simply put, partnerships with salmon farming companies have more than offset any risk they pose by putting more resources and efforts into wild salmon conservation and restoration than any other entity to date. In other words, they have put more on the table than they have taken off in regard to wild salmon.

Participating First Nations in this coalition recognize that science shows that salmon farming, when done responsibly, does not adversely impact wild salmon. This has been demonstrated since the 2012 Cohen Commission and subsequent independent Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat reviews and further academic research. Climate change, a long history of overfishing, impacts to watersheds, fishing interceptions outside of BC, and competition with ocean ranching in Alaska, Japan, and Russia are all contributing to the decline of wild salmon. Activists' statements single out and scapegoat salmon farming for declines to wild salmon and this causes unnecessary and reckless confusion and controversy in Indigenous communities. Meanwhile the industry continues to focus on minimizing its risk to wild salmon.

Partnerships with aquaculture companies have provided resources to support Indigenous Guardian programs and efforts to conduct environmental monitoring and wild salmon restoration. These partners have demonstrated their commitment to supporting the coalition's goals of maintaining a healthy environment and restoring habitat and wild salmon within their territories.

To date, partner companies have contributed funding to Guardian programs, monitoring of sea lice on wild salmon, development of salmon hatcheries for enhancement, access to environmental monitoring data, river and watershed restoration, training, conservation projects, and logistical support for efforts to restore impacted wild salmon populations.

Aquaculture can Contribute to Self-Determination by Lifting Communities from Dependency and Poverty

Seventeen First Nations have negotiated agreements with one or more producer companies that are operating within their territories. Respect, reconciliation, and recognition of First Nations governance, territory, and their position as rightsholders are central to protocol agreements. Most agreements address operational plans, environmental stewardship, wild salmon protection and enhancement, economic development opportunities, profit sharing, employment, and emerging business opportunities.

Every First Nation is taking their own approach to these relationships.

A government-funded socio-economic study that articulates the benefits of salmon farming to First Nations communities and Indigenous peoples in BC has not been conducted as it does not appear to match the political narrative of the Federal Liberal Government. Repressing these benefits and positive relationships in order to secure certain urban ridings for Ministers of Parliament far removed from the coalition's territories is in itself characteristic of colonialism and its legacies that continue to further divide rural coastal communities.



At the coalition's request, producer companies were asked to individually provide confidential information on agreements, contracts, payroll, and other benefits that flow to First Nation communities, Indigenous workers, and Indigenous-owned companies. This information was collated by independent economist RIAS Inc. in Ottawa and is summarized in this report.

This 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.

The coalition notes that as information has not been collected on payroll and the number of Indigenous employees at Indigenous owned companies, the number of FTEs associated with the sector has been significantly underestimated.

Summary of Annual Direct Socio-Economic Benefits of Salmon Farming to BC First Nations



*Source: RIAS Inc. calculations

In total, BC's farmed salmon sector is estimated to generate \$29.2 million in economic activity within First Nations, \$16.7 million in GDP, and 247 jobs earning \$12.8 million in wages per year. Further benefits are generated outside of First Nations communities, amounting to \$54.2 million in economic activity, \$31 million in GDP, and \$23.8 million in wages for 460 workers. Some of these benefits accrue to First Nations members living outside their communities.

As relationships with the farmed salmon sector continue to strengthen and diversify, the ability for First Nations to keep these economic benefits within their communities will increase.

Table 2: Summary of Direct and Indirect Economic Benefits for First Nations

	Within First Nation Communities (est)	Outside Communities (est)	Total
Number of FTE Jobs	247	460	707
Wages (\$ Millions)	\$12.8	\$23.8	\$36.6
Additional Economic Activity (\$ Millions)	\$29.2	\$54.2	\$83.3
GDP (\$ Millions)	\$16.7	\$31.0	\$47.8
Total Economic Benefit for First Nations (\$ Millions)	\$42.0	\$78.0	\$120.0

*Source: RIAS Inc. calculations

Employment in the sector is often more than a 'job' in remote areas and represents a career where Indigenous individuals can advance without having to leave their communities. Providing year-round employment in impoverished communities has the double benefit of lifting entire families away from dependence on social assistance. Many Indigenous employees working in salmon farming have said they see their job as more meaningful when working within their traditional territories, often citing that they are providing further oversight of their people's lands and waters, and in many ways, are protecting them.

Ultimately, communities involved in the sector are finding economic security and wealth that can be grown in concert with the Nation's shared values as part of a diversified economy that balances seasonal employment in tourism and fisheries and resource extraction, such as forestry. Partnerships with the salmon farming sector provide revenues and economic stability in rural communities that act as an economic generator, leading to diversification and other opportunities.

Case Study

— Kitasoo/Xai'Xais

The Kitasoo/Xai'Xais First Nation began farming and processing salmon in the late 1980s, forming a partnership for the business with Mowi in 1998. This was the first agreement developed by a salmon farming company and a First Nation in British Columbia. Mowi operates six salmon farms in Kitasoo/Xai'Xais territory with an average annual harvest of 5,000 tonnes of salmon. The processing plant in Klemtu was recently converted to a smokehouse, and in December of 2021, Walmart Canada was announced as the exclusive retailer of Klemtu Spirit Hot Smoked Atlantic Salmon, a newly launched seafood product produced by the Nation.

Fish farming and processing is the main source of employment in Klemtu, generating more than 50 jobs for the small, remote community on the central coast of British Columbia. The Kitasoo/Xai'xais First Nation prides itself in stewarding their territory and guarding their values. For the Kitasoo/Xai'xais, it is important to ensure that future generations inherit healthy lands and waters to steward for the next millennia.

“Our values ensure that the products we produce in our territory are done so in a way that minimizes the impact on the natural world and other species and does not harm the environment.”

— Isaiah Robinson, General Manager, Kitasoo Development Corporation



Wesley Robinson, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais First Nation, and Andrew Richford walking into the Klemtu smokehouse.

FNFFS coalition calls on Federal Fisheries Minister to respect their jurisdictions and not take actions that would remove salmon farms from their territories

Rights and title set First Nations apart from stakeholders in decisions regarding salmon farming, or other resource-based activities in their territories. The Nations in the coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship retain jurisdiction over their lands, waters, resources, and interests through unextinguished Aboriginal title.

The voices of the coalition's leaders are not being heard by the Fisheries Minister, and when heard, are not being counted. If these Nations' governments and communities have agreed to support the salmon farming sector in their territories, then it goes against 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, including fisheries and aquaculture.

By June 2022, the chiefs and leaders of this coalition will expect the Federal Government to reissue the licences of salmon farms in the territories of the Nations who wish to continue pursuing relationships with the sector.

While activists don't tend to respect the rights and title of First Nations who don't align with their agendas, the federal and provincial governments have the opportunity to see these licence re-issuances as a path forward to partnership, prosperity, self-determination, and the health and future wellness of Indigenous communities. The leaders of this coalition urge politicians not to listen to the misinformed, often urban and far-removed, minority and respect the rights of First Nations to govern in their territories as they need.

This is a historic opportunity for government to truly realize reconciliation and the sovereignty and rights of First Nations in Canada; Nations that - when meaningfully supported - can lead Canada's Blue Economy, drive new investment into their coastal communities, and help their economies recover from the pandemic. This coalition calls on the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to renew the operating licences of salmon farms in their territories in 2022, with a length of term that supports business and investor confidence, so that these Nations, government, and the sector can build a successful, inclusive, and respectful transition plan for 2025.

Reissuing these licences with a minimum six-year term gives First Nations working with salmon farming the time to properly engage with their communities, government-to-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. Due to rapidly changing climatic and oceans conditions, each Nation's plan will be distinctive in its environmental stewardship and food security approaches. These re-issuances will also clear the path for the Province of British Columbia to renew the tenures on which the farms operate.

While it isn't clear what the federal government's definition of 'transitioning' the sector is, this coalition is firm that it should not mean reducing or taking away salmon farming in their territories because that would take away from First Nations communities and families. Indigenous peoples have been managing the ocean and its resources for millennia. The federal government should be working with these coastal Nations and their traditional knowledge to define what transition means to them in their territories.

This coalition expects any transition plans to be built on the true intent of reconciliation; to represent the Nations' autonomous yet connected voices; to respect rights and title; and to deliver positive outcomes for Indigenous communities, for their territories' unique ecosystems, and all of coastal British Columbia.



Grieg Seafood's Managing Director, Rocky Boschman (left) and Councillor Thomas Smith sign a net-cleaning contract between Grieg and the Tlowitsis Nation on May 14, 2021 in Campbell River.

Case Study

– Tlowitsis Nation

In the 1960s, the Tlowitsis were displaced from their village of Kalagwees on Turnour Island by the government. Members have been scattered, and some are struggling with addiction on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and elsewhere. The revenue from salmon farms is used in the development of the Tlowitsis' new community, Nenagwas, which means 'a place to come home to.'

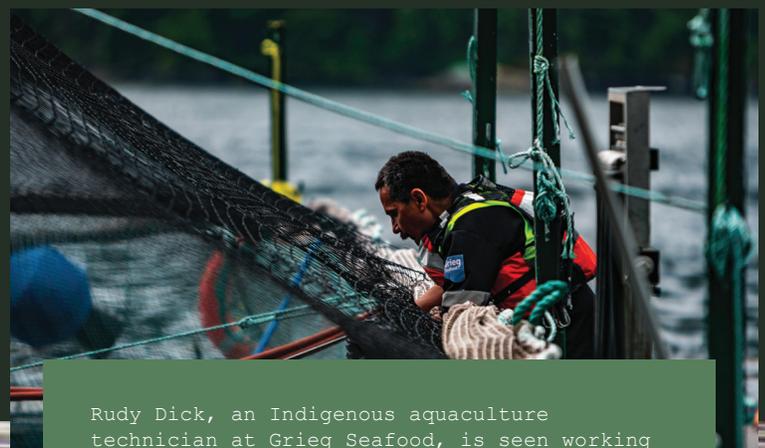
Nenagwas is designed to bring members home and help them heal by connecting them with families and history. In addition to housing, the new community will have an administration office, council hall, recreational sports area, and a day school for young children where Kwak'wala language immersion can take place. More salmon farms like Ga-guump mean more revenue for the Nation, which can assist in these homes, social programs, and good jobs on or servicing the farms.

The Tlowitsis and Grieg Seafood BC signed a partnership agreement in 2014. There are currently three farms operating in Tlowitsis traditional territory, and both parties recently applied jointly for a fourth.

“We have built a solid relationship with Grieg Seafood over more than ten years of many meetings, visiting their farms and travelling to Ottawa, Vancouver and Victoria to speak to regulators about our views of aquaculture. Our Guardians are on the water monitoring the farm activities as well as our members employed by Grieg.

We have taken a lot of time to learn about the industry and our partner before we decided to become involved more directly, and for us, adding more farms in our territory is the clear way forward. Our net-wash service company will also benefit from additional work for our members at a new farm. Industry, including aquaculture, develop community fisheries, and create a mechanism for collaborative governance of fisheries resources.”

– Chief John Smith



Rudy Dick, an Indigenous aquaculture technician at Grieg Seafood, is seen working on his traditional territory in Nootka Sound.

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