



Coalition ‘extremely disappointed’ by DFO Minister’s dismissal of First Nations’ rights and title in “Discovery Islands” decision

LAICH-KWIL-TACH TERRITORY – The Coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship (the Coalition) is extremely disappointed by the Minister of the Department of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, the Honourable Joyce Murray, for not respecting the sovereign authority of the Laich-kwil-tach First Nations (the Wei Wai Kum and We Wai Kai) to decide if, when, or how they want to operate finfish aquaculture in their traditional waters.

Minister Murray decided today not to re-issue any licences in the core territory of the Laich-kwil-tach Nations (the “Discovery Islands”) despite the previous DFO minister’s decision to close 19 farms in the Discovery Islands without proper consultation with First Nations and industry being overturned last year by the federal court for procedural unfairness.

“Today’s decision unfortunately feels beyond procedural unfairness after many months of meetings with the Minister, her department, and DFO staff,” says Dallas Smith, spokesperson for the Coalition. “The Wei Wai Kum and We Wai Kai First Nations sent a thoughtful proposal to DFO in November to re-issue some licences in their core territories. They put forward a cautionary approach to explore how and if finfish farming could be part of their Nations’ overall vision to manage their marine space. This decision to deny all licences in their territories has sent the Nations back to the drawing board in that regard.”

The proposal described a careful, staggered plan for the possible re-introduction of some fish farms in Laich-kwil-tach waters to be led and overseen by the Nations and their stewardship programs. These sites would have operated in partnership with Mowi Canada West, Cermaq Canada, and Grieg Seafood BC.

More importantly, the salmon farms would have served as a critical piece to help the Nations’ advance their holistic marine management plans including growing their Guardian and stewardship programs; enhancing their science capacity using traditional knowledge and Western science; improving wild salmon conservation efforts; and playing a leadership role in the area’s local seafood production.

“First Nations from the coast are trying to find their feet when it comes to reclaiming what was taken away from them by the federal government. Whether it’s creating Marine Protected Areas or deciding whether they want to host fish farms, coastal Nations are trying to take back their inherent rights to manage their traditional waters,” adds Smith.

“This was not about protecting the sector or the companies operating in it – this was about the sovereignty of the Laich-kwil-tach Nations and their right to decide for themselves whether salmon farming, or any other resource, is the right fit for their marine plans. Unfortunately, the decision was once again taken away from them by a government located 5,000 kms away from their territories.”

Media inquiries: dallas@firstnationsforfinfish.ca. *The Chiefs of the Wei Wai Kum and We Wai Kai will make further statements on the decision once they receive official notice from Minister Murray next week.*