

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

For Immediate Release

August 18, 2020

### First Nations Leaders Declare Collapse of Pacific Sockeye

*(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔ/sełilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.— Aug. 18, 2020) — Due to catastrophic decline in stocks, the First Nations Leadership Council is calling on Bernadette Jordan, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, to issue an emergency order to close all sockeye fisheries on the Fraser River.*

“Fisheries and Oceans recently put the estimated return of sockeye to the Fraser at 283,000. This is the lowest return in my lifetime, and probably the lowest in history,” said BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “Ten years ago, the Cohen Commission was looking into sockeye decline when we had over a million fish returning. The federal government has clearly not taken this situation seriously – this is a non-partisan issue. Minister Jordan needs to declare this stock collapsed and issue an emergency order to close all sockeye fisheries. We don’t have any more time,” he continued.

#### Indigenous communities face the greatest impact

The Aboriginal right to fish was won by Musqueam in the Supreme Court of Canada in the *R v Sparrow, 1990* decision, which affirmed Musqueam’s right to fish, and set out criteria to determine whether government decisions affecting Aboriginal rights are justifiable (known as the ‘Sparrow Test’). These fishing rights are protected and affirmed under the *Constitution Act, 1982*, recognized under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and form a fundamental part of First Nations inherent right to self-government. Salmon is an integral part of First Nations societies and cultures since time immemorial. But the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has consistently prioritized commercial fishing and failed in its fiduciary responsibility to ensure priority access by First Nations for food, social, and ceremonial fisheries.

“Now is the time for First Nations in BC to come together on a coherent strategy to save and rebuild Pacific salmon stocks. The first step is to urge the Minister for an emergency order to close fisheries on these decimated stocks,” said Chief Dalton Silver, Fisheries Representative for the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “This crisis, and a subsequent emergency order, may allow the Nations who have accessed these species for thousands of years, and rely on these stocks for food security in remote communities to access their traditional harvests.”



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The First Nations Fisheries Council of BC is investigating the cumulative effects impacting sockeye stocks that affect these magnificent creatures. Research has pointed to changing ocean conditions resulting from climate change that affect survivability and food supply, non-selective harvest methods, increased predation, and open-net pen fish farming on migration routes. The Big Bar Landslide is also anticipated to have significant effects on returning fish to successfully reach their spawning grounds.

“First Nations leadership has been calling on the Federal Government to take real action to save pacific salmon stocks for decades now,” said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit. “Fisheries and Oceans Canada has consistently failed to take our calls seriously. It is now time for their failure to be recognized, and for responsibilities for the full jurisdiction and management of salmon stocks to be transferred back to First Nations.”

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