

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Statement
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FNLC Calls for Discovery Islands Decision to be Upheld

(X̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̱lilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) denounces the applications of Mowi Canada West Inc, Cermaq Canada Ltd and Grieg Seafood BC Ltd to overturn the Discovery Islands Decision. The decision rules:

- The phasing out of existing salmon farming facilities in the Discovery Islands, with the upcoming 18-month period being the last time this area is licensed.
- Stipulations that no new fish of any size may be introduced into Discovery Islands facilities during this time.
- Mandates that all farms be free of fish by June 30th, 2022, while existing fish at the sites can complete their growth-cycle and be harvested.

The areas impacted by this decision are some of the oldest sites on the West Coast and are located on the traditional territory of the Homalco, Klahoose, K'ómoks, Kwaikah, Tla'amin, We Wai Kai and Wei Wai Kum First Nations. Both Mowi Canada West Inc. and Cermaq Canada Ltd. which operate in the area, have filed applications with the federal court seeking injunctions and to overturn the decision.

The FNLC welcomed the December 2020 decision from Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard, as it is an important acknowledgement of the impacts open net pen fish farms have on wild salmon beyond their site.

The FNLC calls for the decision to be upheld. It is clear that the majority of First Nations in BC oppose open net pen fish farming due to the detrimental effects it has on wild salmon: the 102 First Nations that support the removal of fish farms from the ocean are supportive of Minister Jordan's decision.

Salmon stocks have steadily been declining at alarming rates, leaving some runs functionally extinct. This is extremely concerning to many First Nations as salmon are central to First Nations cultures and economies in much of British Columbia.

A variety of factors are responsible for the drop in salmon stocks, including overfishing, climate change, sediment from industrial forestry, natural disasters such as the 2019 Big Bar Slide, and the introduction of pathogens including heart and Skeletal Muscle Inflammation (HSMI), Piscine Reo-Virus (PRV), and hazardous levels of parasitic sea lice.

The Cohen Commission, which published its landmark study on the impact of salmon farming on wild salmon in 2012, recommended shutting the open-net farms in the Discovery Islands by September 30, 2020 if they continued to pose a risk to wild salmon. Recent research and the fish farming corporations' own data confirm that the farms are actively contributing to plummeting wild salmon stocks, and these farms need to be closed. The FNLC supported calls from First Nations in the Discovery Islands to end fish farms, and on December 3, 2020, urged the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to fully implement the *Precautionary Principle* which prioritizes and champions conservation measures when there is knowledge of a risk of serious or irreversible harm to the environment.

Overturning the decision would be counter to the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and would effectively create a situation where First Nations Inherent Title and Rights are contingent on the Crown. The FNLC refutes this, as Indigenous Peoples are the proper title holders and the original caretakers and stewards of our respective traditional territories. The FNLC urges Mowi Canada West Inc, Cermaq Canada Ltd and Grieg Seafood BC Ltd to exercise proactive conservation-based actions and work with First Nations in rebuilding Pacific salmon stocks.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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