



BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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BCAFN SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
March 4 & 5, 2026
In person & online via Zoom

Resolution 05(e)/2026

SUBJECT: CALL TO BAN TRAWLING IN PACIFIC COASTAL WATERS

MOVED BY:

SECONDED BY:

DECISION:

WHEREAS:

- A. First Nations in British Columbia hold inherent and constitutionally protected rights, title and jurisdiction over their lands, waters and marine territories as affirmed by First Nations' laws, legal orders and governance systems;
- B. Coastal First Nations in British Columbia rely on healthy marine ecosystems to sustain food sovereignty in addition to governance systems, cultural and spiritual well-being, climate, and economic resilience;
- C. Section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982 recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights, including rights related to fisheries, food security, cultural practices, and economic livelihoods;
- D. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration), which the government of Canada has adopted without qualification, and has, alongside the Province of British Columbia, committed to implement, affirms:
Article 25: Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands,

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territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard; and

Article 29: Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination;

- E. The United Nations Declaration Act Action Plan, includes 11 fisheries-related actions, including: #37: Enhance collaborative tools agreements and transparent approaches to better deliver on the collaborative design, development, delivery and management of fisheries as well as conservation and protection of fish habitat; and #38: Provide predictable and flexible funding to ensure Indigenous nations and organizations have the capacity to meaningfully participate in advisory, co-management, and decision-making processes tied to aquatic resources and oceans management;
- F. Trawling, both midwater and bottom, is a fishing practice involving dragging heavy nets across the ocean floor to catch fish and other marine organisms, causing significant and often irreversible damage to marine ecosystems, including overfishing and the destruction of sensitive habitats. As a result, it leads to biodiversity loss and poses a serious threat to the long-term fisheries sustainability;
- G. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) regulates commercial trawling in B.C. Publicly available spatial data from DFO regarding the trawl footprint in B.C. is often cited as outdated, with the last official comprehensive layer ending in 2016;
- H. Trawling is recognized as a major source of carbon emissions contributing to ocean acidification and climate change. It is estimated that mobile bottom fishing disturbs 2.1 Mt of carbon annually in the Canadian Pacific;
- I. The protection and restoration of Pacific Coastal marine ecosystems are vital to addressing the climate crisis, securing intergenerational food security, and upholding First Nations' rights and responsibilities to future generations.
- J. The Council of the Haida Nation passed Resolution 2024-06, which calls for the elimination of trawling in Haida Gwaii waters in 2024;
- K. Old Massett Village Council, as a community of the Haida Nation and rights and title holder within Haida territory, affirms that Haida Gwaii waters are central to Haida governance, cultural continuity, and the exercise of inherent stewardship responsibilities grounded in Haida law and legal orders; and
- L. For Old Massett and the broader Haida Nation, food sovereignty encompasses the right and

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responsibility to harvest, access, manage, and protect marine resources in accordance with Haida values, laws, and intergenerational obligations, ensuring the availability of traditional foods that sustain community health, identity, and cultural practices;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly acknowledge the risks to community food security and resilience arising from destructive fishing practices and support First Nations' authority to take necessary measures to safeguard marine resources and traditional food systems;
2. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call upon the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada to:
 - i. Immediately ban midwater and bottom trawling in B.C.'s Pacific Coastal waters, and;
 - ii. provide meaningful co-development of marine management policies consistent with the UN Declaration and related provincial and federal legislation, including mechanisms for First Nations' free, prior and informed consent before authorizing any commercial and industrial fishing practices.
 - iii. work with rights and title holders to urgently implement all fisheries-related Action Plan Measures in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan* by 2028;
3. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly direct the Regional Chief to advocate for legislative, regulatory and policy reforms necessary to eliminate destructive fishing practices, including midwater and bottom trawling, in partnership with impacted First Nations;
4. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call for urgent federal and provincial investment in Marine Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, as well as First Nations-led habitat restoration, monitoring and First Nations guardians programs to support the recovery of impacted marine ecosystems;
5. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call upon the federal and provincial governments to engage in meaningful nation-to-nation dialogue with the Haida Nation and impacted communities to ensure that marine management decisions uphold First Nations' free, prior and informed consent and prioritize First Nations-led conservation and fisheries governance; and
6. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly call for increased investment in First Nations-led marine monitoring, Guardians programs, and data sovereignty initiatives to strengthen stewardship and long-term protection of marine ecosystems affected by trawling.

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