



FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT



The BC
Aboriginal Fisheries
Commission

NEWS RELEASE

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First Nation Fisheries Panel Calls for Overhaul of Pacific Fishery

(North Vancouver, BC) – A panel of Aboriginal fisheries experts appointed by the First Nations Summit and the BC Aboriginal Fisheries Commission has come down with a far reaching and hard hitting report entitled “***Our place at the table: First Nations in the BC Fishery***”. The report contains 7 recommendations including the call for an overhaul of the BC’s fishery and immediate recognition of Aboriginal fishing and fisheries management rights. It further recommends an immediate moratorium on further introduction of Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQs) in the west coast fishery unless and until the legitimate Aboriginal share of all fisheries is addressed.

The reports authors, Russ Jones, Marcel Shepert and Neil Sterritt, also say that a good faith gesture to initialize the changes their report calls for would be for Canada to immediately “allocate to first Nations as an interim measure, a minimum of 50% share of all fisheries, with an understanding that this may reach 100% in some fisheries”.

Panel members say the interim 50% share would signal a serious attempt to reconcile aboriginal and crown title and to recognize that First Nations rights to BC fisheries are as important as others in the commercial and recreational fishing sectors. The panel points out that since Aboriginal title is the underlying title, putting it on a more equal footing in the interim is justified.

Arnie Narcisse, Chairman of the BC Aboriginal Fisheries Commissions says “the Panel’s call for an immediate moratorium of quotas is a must. There can and will be no certainty in the west coast fishery until First Nations Aboriginal and Title rights are addressed and respected”.

“This independent First Nation Panel on Fisheries and their report are a necessity as the federal and provincial governments did not incorporate First Nations concerns as a part of the Terms of Reference for the McRae/Pearse Panel on Fisheries”, said Grand Chief Edward John, a member of the First Nations Summit Political Executive.

“This report will be tabled with the leaders of the First Nations Summit today and will be sent to all First Nations in BC for their review and consideration. I strongly urge First Nations leaders as well as the federal and provincial government to read

this report and seriously consider all of the recommendations. This report may well form the blueprint for future discussions on how Aboriginal Rights and Title can be addressed while ensuring the protection and preservation of the fisheries resource”, added Chief John.

The First Nation Panel on Fisheries was created to examine fisheries management regimes that reflect issues of conservation, sustainability, Aboriginal rights and the economic needs of First Nations. The three member panel studied the Fraser/Columbia and Skeena watersheds and Coastal areas of BC and paralleled the work of the federal/provincial fisheries task group who recently released the McRae/Pearse report on fisheries.

Recommendations of the First Nation Panel on Fisheries

1. Canada must immediately take steps to ensure First Nations have access to adequate quantities of fisheries resources for food, social and ceremonial purposes.
2. As a starting point and as an interim measure, Canada take immediate steps to allocate to First Nations a minimum 50 per cent share of all fisheries, with the understanding that this may eventually reach 100 per cent in some fisheries.
3. First Nations themselves must address intertribal allocations.
4. Canada immediately increase treaty settlement funds, or funds through other negotiating processes, to enable purchase or buy-back of licences and allow for the reallocation recommended above.
5. Canada immediately recognize in policy, and implement through negotiated agreements, the Aboriginal right to manage fisheries.
6. Canada clearly articulate how it will provide fisheries resources for First Nations commercial benefit, in light of the uncertainty created by the *Kapp* decision and the loss of pilot sales.
7. A moratorium be placed on the further introduction of individual property rights regimes such as Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQs) unless First Nation interests including allocations in those fisheries first addressed.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in the treaty negotiation process in British Columbia. Further background information on the Summit and a complete copy of the First Nation Fisheries Panel report may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

The BCAFC works with most First Nations in BC on issues related to protect and enhance the aboriginal fishing rights of the First Nations of British Columbia. Further information on the BCAFC and a complete copy of the First Nation Fisheries Panel report may be found at www.bcafc.org.

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