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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Federal Government Must Respect the Aboriginal Right to Fish

(Coast Salish Territory / Vancouver – February 17, 2011) On February 15, 2011, Gail Shea, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, issued a public statement regarding the Pacific halibut fishery. The Minister's statement focussed on the challenges of allocation of the Pacific halibut fishery between commercial fishermen and recreational harvesters.

The BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit and Union of BC Indian Chiefs have requested an immediate meeting with Minister Shea to express the deep and collective concern of the exclusion of Aboriginal fisheries of Pacific halibut.

"It is now an established legal principle, through the Supreme Court of Canada, that any allocation of priorities after valid conservation measures have been implemented must be given to the Aboriginal fishery. It is imperative that Minister Shea recognize and acknowledge this reality, said Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould of the BC Assembly of First Nations. "To make an allocation decision regarding the Pacific Halibut fishery without honouring the priorities set out by the Supreme Court of Canada, and the principles as stated in the *United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples*, shows an obvious disregard for the laws of this country and, most importantly, for the inherent rights of First Nations."

"The federal Minister's public statements regarding the allocation of the halibut fishery between the commercial and sport fishers totally disregards First Nations' constitutionally recognized and protected fishery rights. While treaty negotiations are underway the federal government has continually stated that fisheries issues are not on the table. Meanwhile DFO is making decisions regarding allocations such as the Pacific Halibut fishery. This is clearly a breach of good faith negotiations", said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit political executive.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated "The Harper Government will not succeed in their ongoing attempts to ignore, vilify and/or diminish our Aboriginal Title, Rights and Treaty Rights. Our communities are not mere stakeholders to a resource, such as Pacific halibut, asking for an allocation. We are stewards of our lands and waters. Generation after generation, our communities flourished from the abundance of our territories. Any attempt to dispense of our interests will be vigorously challenged."

For more information and further comment:

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