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## News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 2, 2012

### First Nations Welcome Cohen Commission Final Report and Recommendations

**(Coast Salish Territory / Vancouver – November 2, 2012)** On October 31, 2012, the Honourable Bruce I. Cohen, Commissioner, released his Final Report on the decline of sockeye salmon in the Fraser River.

“Commissioner Cohen tactfully articulated what most Canadians are beginning to realize, the Harper Government has politically stigmatized ‘environmental protection.’ He observed the total hypocrisy and complete contradiction of the federal department, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, whose fundamental mandate is to defend and safeguard wild salmon but as a department has long fought for the open-net fish farm industry,” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. “It is astonishingly remarkable that it took more than three million pages of documents, 179 witnesses at a \$25-million inquiry to tell Ottawa, wild salmon first!”

In regards to aquaculture, one of Commissioner Cohen’s most critical recommendations was that DFO should focus on the management of wild fisheries, and that the mandate for salmon farming should be moved from DFO to another executive branch of government, as promotion of aquaculture development could be in conflict with the interests of wild salmon stocks.

“We are pleased that Commissioner Cohen has echoed First Nations’ concerns regarding the federal government’s legislative changes to the *Fisheries Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, through omnibus Bills C-38 and C-45, as well as the recent federal budget cuts that will undoubtedly have serious and negative impacts on DFO’s ability to carry out its mandate to protect and preserve wild salmon stocks” stated Chief Doug White III of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “While this is a critically important report that will hopefully have a profound effect on increasing and protecting Fraser River salmon stocks for future generations, it is incredibly troubling and frustrating to see the erosion of DFO’s ability to carry out its mandate. The federal government must rethink its strategy and provide DFO with the necessary financial and regulatory resources to implement the recommendations contained in the Cohen Report”.

The Cohen Report emphasizes the importance of habitat and the need for habitat protection and ecosystem management. The Report underscores the role of cumulative impacts and highlights lack of information and the need for research and funding to support research. It states what First Nations in BC have long argued, that First Nations have a pivotal role in informing DFO’s management for fisheries.

“The Cohen Report calls on Canada to take seriously its constitutional responsibilities, including the responsibility to manage and conserve wild salmon stocks and the wild salmon habitat, but does not fully recognize our Nations’ governance role in fisheries,” said BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould. She continued, “First Nations demand meaningful involvement in the governance and management of wild salmon in our traditional territories, as supported in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The recommendations of the Cohen Report also need to be considered in the context of the broader federal legislative agenda. We call on Canada to partner with First Nations in moving forward with the sustainable management of this critical resource.”

#### For more information and further comment:

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