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News Release

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First Nations concerned with lack of engagement on proposed Federal Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel

Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC) – The BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit and Union of BC Indian Chiefs (First Nations Leadership Council) are raising concerns regarding Prime Minister Stephen Harper's announcement that a national Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel will be established. The announcement was made on Wednesday, May 30, 2012 at a National Fish and Wildlife Congress event in Ottawa, organized in part by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Prime Minister Harper stated that the government will be developing regulations to guide these efforts over the next six months.

The proposed panel will report to the federal environment minister, and will help to shape government policy on matters related to fishing and hunting. The panel will purportedly help to ensure that the government's decisions are "based on sound science and balanced advice" said the Prime Minister; however, the First Nations Leadership Council asserts that without a separate First Nations process, or without the inclusion of First Nations in the panel itself, advice received will not be balanced. To date, there has been no announcement by the federal government regarding any engagement with First Nations by the proposed panel.

"The Prime Minister is deluded to think that this panel will provide balance," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "But Canadians understand that when you stack a panel with loyal card carrying conservative constituents the Prime Minister will get the result he wants. In fact I have the sneaking suspicion that he was so paranoid about First Nations participation that he has attempted to remove us completely from the national conversation."

BC First Nations have managed our hunting and fishing from time immemorial, and are concerned about the development of an advisory board that excludes First Nations participation, and lacks a clear process to consult and accommodate First Nations on the proposed changes.

"Our ancestors and our elders have passed on to First Nations the obligation and responsibility to protect our water, land and resources as they have before us, and to pass on our traditional values and practices to future generations," said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit. "Our history, our teachings, and our knowledge can add value to Canada's conversation on matters related to hunting and fishing. It is unclear why this Prime Minister sees us differently than other Canadians."

The establishment of such a panel directly contradicts and undermines statements made by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Deputy Minister Claire Dansereau in September 2011. She stated during her testimony to the Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River (Cohen Commission) that DFO consults with First Nations on all matters, and that making any changes in Ministerial discretion would require significant consultation. In order for Canada to meet its constitutional obligations and promote reconciliation, Canada must engage First Nations in all matters related to their hunting and fishing rights.

"The Harper government is facing growing opposition to its budget implementation legislation," said BCAFN Regional Chief Jody Wilson Raybould. "The announcement of this hunting and angling advisory panel, which so far excludes the meaningful participation of First Nations, is not a satisfactory response to the criticisms and does not give First Nations confidence that the Harper government shares our interest in protecting our territories and resources. First Nations and all Canadians deserve more. We are faced with making important and far reaching decisions about the future of our lands and resources. A truly "responsible" resource development plan would recognize the important contribution of First Nations and would provide for our meaningful engagement in advisory panels like this one."

BC First Nations are glad to see that Prime Minister Harper is beginning to recognize the impact of his decisions on the management of natural resources, but are left to ask, "Why are we not at the table?" Balanced decision making on these matters requires the input of First Nations, and First Nations want to know why our perspective is being excluded from this process.

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