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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Department of Fisheries and Oceans ignore the rule of law:
First Nations Leadership Council calls on the Minister of
Fisheries and Oceans to work with First Nations to protect the
depleted Fraser River sockeye fishery**

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver – The First Nations Leadership Council, being the Executives of the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations summon the Honourable Loyola Hearn, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to discuss the protection of the sockeye resource and Aboriginal fishing rights and work with BC First Nations on a priority basis to ensure the protection of the 2007 sockeye fishery.

“Without question the conservation of the sockeye fishery is the primary concern for all First Nations along the Fraser River. This has clearly been illustrated by the Tseil Waututh First Nation’s commendable decision to forgo their sockeye fishery this year in the name of conservation,” said Grand Chief Edward John, a member of the First Nations Summit political executive. “However, many First Nations are understandably frustrated with DFO’s inconsistent fisheries management and allocation methods which continue to put the fishery at risk.”

First Nations in the Fraser Basin are frustrated that DFO officials continue to allow a 2007 sport and commercial fishery. Despite low sockeye returns, DFO advised First Nations that conservation was not a concern and still proceeded to charge a significant number of Musqueam and Sto:lo fishermen. Meanwhile, sport and recreational fishers continued to fish within view of the protest fishery, which is a complete contradiction of the rule of law according to the *Sparrow* decision.

“DFO has once again shown that they have absolutely no regard for First Nations legal and constitutional right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes, a right that is second only to conservation”, said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “The First Nations Leadership Council are in full and complete support of First Nations Statements that *“the Department of Fisheries and Oceans’ attempts to keep the First Nations off the fishing grounds are in violation of a Supreme Court of Canada decision”* (Sparrow decision, 1990).

“We are calling for Minister Hearn to direct his officials to immediately halt all commercial and sport fisheries and to respect the rule of law by giving priority to the First Nations fishery after conservation needs are met”, said Shawn Atleo, BC Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. “First Nations will not stand by and continue to allow the Government of Canada’s mismanagement of this valuable resource.

The First Nations Leadership Council is also calling on Minister Hearn to meet in person to discuss how DFO and BC First Nations can work in partnership to protect sustainable and healthy salmon stocks for all future generations.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

The Council works together to politically represent the interests of First Nations in British Columbia and develop strategies and actions to bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia.

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