

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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FNLC Demands Change to DFO's Science Review and Decision-Making Processes

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is deeply disturbed by recently released information regarding Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) scientific review and decision-making processes which alleges that scientific reports are purposely altered to support presupposed conclusions and prioritize the interests of industry and continuation of the status quo over and above the sustainability and protection of marine life and respect for First Nations inherent title and rights. The FNLC calls for an independent, external investigation and an overhaul of these processes to restore the credibility of DFO to carry out reviews and decision-making consistent with its mandate of sustainably managing marine resources, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and explicit direction from Prime Minister Trudeau.

Numerous subject matter experts have identified these critical issues, including a January 2023 public letter from 16 reputable experts, internal DFO documents released under a Freedom of Information request, and testimony from spring 2022 to the federal Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Recent evidence indicates that DFO employees manipulated and cherry-picked statistical data in scientific report 2022/045 to misrepresent the significant association between fish farms and wild juvenile salmon's infestation with sea lice, altering the content to claim that there is no connection between fish farms and sea lice in wild stocks, and disregarding the established peer reviewed Canadian and international research.

Grand Chief Phillip Stewart, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated "there is rigorous scientific research from around the world establishing that open net pen fish farms spread sea lice to wild salmon. By ignoring the wealth of knowledge in this review and altering statistical research to support a pre-determined claim that there is no connection between fish farms and sea lice DFO is committing research fraud. This is a high stakes issue that urgently impacts and simultaneously excludes First Nations, especially as DFO plans to release the Fish Farm Transition Plan in June 2023, which will heavily draw on these biased reports. The Government of Canada must step in and fully investigate these corrupted processes, initiate long-term reforms, and implement interim measures to ensure that in-process decisions are not based on manipulated and pre-determined conclusions."

"Concerns about the science review and decision-making of DFO have long been raised by experts in both Indigenous knowledge and western sciences," continued Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. "DFO's inaction in the face of this shocking evidence is unacceptable. Bureaucrats and industry-associated scientists cannot claim to provide independent, peer review. These and other allegations, such as data manipulation, are inconsistent with the scientific method and a clear violation of internationally recognized scientific standards as well as DFO's mandate of sustainably managing fisheries, in alignment with the precautionary principle. Salmon and other marine life are in crisis, but DFO has proven unwilling to take bold action and implement the UN Declaration."



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“Despite the explicit mandate given by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, DFO continues to infringe upon the inherent title and rights of First Nations,” concluded Hugh Braker, Executive of the First Nations Summit. “The UN Declaration is clear – First Nations have a right to conserve, protect and control the productive capacity of our territories and resources, and a spiritual relationship to our waters and marine resources that we must preserve for future generations. DFO’s actions contravene Canada’s legal obligations in the UN Declaration to recognize and protect these resources in partnership with First Nations, numerous court decisions regarding consultation, and the Prime Minister’s clear direction to build relationships based on recognition of rights, respect, and cooperation. What will it take for DFO to cease excluding First Nations from these scientific and decision-making processes, including the placement and management of fish farms on our territories, and infringing on our title and rights?”

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

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