



## First Nation Communities and Entrepreneurs in Salmon Aquaculture in B.C.

What is well known is the Federal Government's intention to transition the existing salmon farming industry in British Columbia from the use of conventional net-pens by 2025. The first stage of this transition is to phase out 19 existing salmon farm facilities in the Discovery Islands area by this summer.

What is less known is that many First Nation communities and First Nation entrepreneurs are actively involved in salmon farming aquaculture in British Columbia. Many First Nations have made significant investments and are full or part owners of the operation or supporting businesses. They have established partnerships with industry. Today, most B.C. farmed salmon is produced under partnership with First Nations, resulting in jobs and livelihoods for hundreds of Indigenous Canadians. These permanent, year-round jobs typically pay more than the average wage available in the area, mostly in remote Coastal communities, and are not reliant on a seasonal fishing or tourism season.

There are limited economic-development and employment opportunities in these rural, remote B.C. coastal First Nation communities. Commercial fishing and forestry, previously the mainstays of the economy, are in decline. Many First Nation employees/contractors have already transitioned to the salmon aquaculture sector due to the lack of opportunities within the commercial fishery. First Nations do not have the same luxury as shareholders or others to simply move to another jurisdiction or take up another

business, trade, or vocation.

Salmon farming in B.C. is a billion-dollar business. It is the province's number one food export product. If this sector is gone, many rural communities will suffer and will be at risk of being wiped out economically.

There are no immediate viable equal value replacement options available to First Nations; the sablefish farming sector in B.C. is small and has challenges that will take many years and planning to resolve. Seaweed is not a high value species and seaweed aquaculture requires more research to determine if it can meet the expectations for carbon capture and if the volumes that will be needed to be financially viable will not be a detriment to the environment. Land based salmon farming has not yet achieved large scale commercial viability. Any new investment in land based systems would likely be located close to transportation hubs and markets far away from rural communities. And compared with traditional net pen farming, they are not an energy efficient method of food production

The most recent studies undertaken by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans show that salmon farming can be done safely with minimal risk to wild fish resources and the environment. The industry has evolved over the years with vast improvements to technology and management.

Government strategy can sometimes have unintended consequences. To build back better post COVID government support is needed to maintain

businesses that are succeeding and thriving in rural communities, to recognize the potential the salmon farming sector has in providing healthy food sources, employment and economic benefits to coastal communities and Canadians generally.

The Association has sent a letter to Minister Murray and several of her colleagues asking that the Federal Government to re-visit their decision, to accept the science from the DFO, and more importantly to take time to meet properly with those First Nation communities and entrepreneurs who are directly impacted by this directive.

While salmon aquaculture may not be a choice for some First Nations, the Federal Government must respect the rights of the First Nations who do support and have a stake in salmon farming. A true measure of reconciliation is to allow and support First Nations who wish to support an industry that enables them to derive a livelihood from their territories.

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## BC Coastal First Nations call for renewal of Salmon Farm Licenses

The Coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship (FNFFS) convened a gathering on March 21, 2022 in Campbell River releasing their economic survey report. First Nation Chiefs and leaders, along with MLAs and North Vancouver Island Mayors, and member of the salmon farming industry were in attendance.



Dallas Smith

This coalition of First Nations leaders was formed, united over a shared concern that their rights to make economic decisions for their territories are being ignored. They are calling on the Federal Government to respect their Indigenous rights and title and immediately re-issue soon-to-expire salmon farming licences in their traditional territories.

There are 79 farms in BC which have licences that will expire in June and there are fears that the DFO Minister Joyce Murray won't renew them because of the ruling Liberal party's commitment to transition from open-net pen farming in BC.

The FNFFS stated in their press release, "Our coalition is opposed to the federal government disregarding science and bowing to unfounded activist claims on salmon farming that, if heeded,

will severely damage our communities, and deny our rights and title. To protect these rights our economic self-determination, and our members, our Nations call on the federal government to immediately re-issue salmon farming licenses in our territories."

"Re-issuance will give us time to further engage with our members on the positive transition and diversification of the salmon farming sector. This process should be led by First Nation governance, economic development, and environmental stewardship resulting in a tangible expression of reconciliation. This will support the goals and future wellbeing of

our communities without compromising the surrounding ecosystem and wild salmon."

[The economic impact](#) survey report highlights the direct economic benefits to First Nations in coastal BC exceed \$50 million annually through more than 276 full time jobs, benefit payments, and contracts with indigenous-owned companies.

In total, when indirect and induced economic activity is factored in, First Nation interests in BC's farmed salmon sector on and off reserves are estimated to generate \$83.3 million in economic activity, \$47.8 million in GDP, and 707 jobs earning \$36.6 million in wages per year.

"Salmon farming has lifted entire coastal Indigenous communities out of poverty. It injects money into our communities, creates meaningful employment for our members, provides opportunities for First Nations-owned business to supply the sector, and funds projects that contribute to the wellness of our people and wild salmon," "As coastal Nations, wild salmon are our priority, and we would not put centuries of stewardship at risk for short-term gains. Participating Nations of this coalition recognize science shows that responsible salmon farming does not adversely impact wild salmon."

Dallas Smith, spokesperson for FNFFS, Tlowitsis Nation said "BC's First Nations are positioned to lead Canada's Blue Economy, but that potential can only be realized when Nations have the support, and the right, to carve out their own unique paths to economic self-determination".

