



Native Brotherhood of British Columbia

CANADA'S SENIOR INDIAN ORGANIZATION [Founded in 1931]

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November 24, 2019

Honourable Bernadette Jordan
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and
the Canadian Coast Guard
By email: min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Re: Emergency Disaster Relief for BC Fishing Industry

Dear Minister Jordan,

We would like to extend our congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. It is a complex and challenging file with many important matters. One of the most pressing is the crisis facing BC salmon fishery participants created by the 2019 salmon failure, which many in your department believe was brought about as a result of climate change related impacts.

We are writing to ask your support for locating Climate Change Disaster Assistance for the 2019 commercial salmon fishermen including indigenous fish harvesters in First Nations' economic fisheries. As you can see from the attached report, 2019 commercial marine harvests and value are negligible – they are the lowest since at least 1951 (end of DFO's publically available data base). Threee Licenced Area fleets had no fishing opportunities (Area B seine, Area E gillnet and Area H troll) and consequently these salmon fishermen have no earnings, unless they were double licenced for another salmon area. Areas A, C, G and F had reduced fishing opportunities producing little in the way of harvest or earnings. All in all, seine fishermen made six percent of their earnings averaged over the last 10 years (down 94%), gillnetters income was 23 percent of their 10 year average (down 77%) and trollers as a gear-type earned 87 percent of their 10 year average (down 13%).

At 3.5 million pounds caught in 2019, processing plants and their employees had little to no salmon to process. Shoreworkers and tendermen worked a fraction of their normal weeks. They also need emergency financial assistance. Shoreworkers who have 54 years of seniority at Canfisco's Vancouver plant earned \$8,000 for herring and salmon seasons and have not enough hours to qualify for EI.

As a result, people supported by the salmon fishery had little to no income since September 2018 - (soon it will be January 2020) and as a result, the vast majority are not able to qualify for EI. Over 50% of salmon fishermen are Indigenous, and the salmon returns were so poor that in many territories First Nations were not even able to harvest food fish. Fishing industry families are living in poverty.

There are few fishermen left in the salmon fishery – Pacific Region can give you the accurate figures but we believe that fewer than 700 marine commercial fish harvesters participated in 2019 or prepared their boats for fisheries that did not occur. We are asking for assistance for the fish harvesters who geared up ready to fish in 2019. As you know in BC, many licence holders are no longer fishermen. We are not asking for disaster assistance for them. Long-time shoreworkers and others who make their income from salmon can be identified by salmon processing companies and would number around 700.

This is an urgent matter. We have been advising government since August about the impacts of the 2019 salmon season and asking for Climate Change Disaster Assistance. Things have only become worse for people.

- We are asking for financial assistance in any form - from the Department that Government deems appropriate. It is so urgent that you speak to your Cabinet colleagues to identify funds that can be used to support fishermen and allied workers. We suspect that EI style benefits would work best. If that is the case we ask that payments equalling maximum EI benefits be extended to fishermen, shoreworkers and tendermen who did not qualify for EI or who are collecting less than maximum benefits and to extend the period of coverage from August 2019 to June 2020.
- We are also asking that your Department refund salmon licence fees paid for the 2019 season and for those who did not use their log books, a return of the log-book fee.
- We are also asking that your Department make moorage in Small Craft Harbours free for salmon vessels.
- We are also asking that forgivable loans up to \$10,000 be made available to vessel owners for repairs and maintenance to their vessels which would be non-repayable if receipts are provided for work done.

We are certainly willing to meet with you to further explain. No one from the Federal Government has talked to any salmon fishermen's organization about the disaster, despite our many letters and requests.

The commercial industry is concerned that climate change impacts are going to spread beyond this season to other years and beyond salmon to additional species. We are calling upon Fisheries and Oceans, in conjunction with other departments and BC and First Nations' governments, to hold climate change adaptation policy discussions to look at ways that will allow fishermen, shoreworkers and processors to adjust to future climate driven changes, good and bad, in species health, numbers, habitat and access.

Sincerely,

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CC

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