



## MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 1, 2020

### **Tšilhqot'in Nation Calls on DFO to partner with the Nation to Recover and Rebuild Chinook Stocks in the Fraser River**

**Williams Lake, BC (July 1, 2020):** The Tšilhqot'in Nation is calling for an immediate meeting with Fisheries Minister Jordan to address the on-going decline of Chinook stocks in the Fraser River. On June 19, 2020, DFO announced the 2020 fishing plans for Fraser River Chinook. While the Tšilhqot'in Nation welcomes the stronger restrictions on exploitation, best available science indicates that the 2020 Chinook management measures will not result in the rebuilding and recovery of these stocks from their current threatened conservation status. Continuing down this path will result in extirpation of Tšilhqot'in stocks which have been with us since time immemorial. This will have devastating impacts on us, our food security, our ability to exercise our rights and our associated cultural practices.

Exploitation management is an important lever to manage these declining stocks; but will not reverse the population decline and mitigate extirpation risk facing Fraser River Chinook. Further, DFO's other stated areas of focus to protect and restore Chinook populations (habitat protection, climate change adaption, improved stock assessment, enhanced science and collaboration) will not address the imminent extirpation risk some of these populations face. Alternative management actions are required and the Tšilhqot'in Nation believes that immediate steps must be taken to implement strategic emergency enhancement of key stocks.

Chinook Stocks that are central to the Nation's fishery have been experiencing a decline for many years. The Tšilhqot'in Nation has faced or implemented closures to our Chinook fishery as the returns continue to plummet to historic lows, forfeiting the Aboriginal right to harvest fish protected under Section 35 of the Constitution. The Big Bar slide has further imperilled our valuable stocks, with a loss of 87% of early timed Chinook, and 50% loss of our later timed stocks in 2019.

The Tšilhqot'in Nation practices traditional fishing methods that are highly selective and low impact, making the Tšilhqot'in fishery one of the most sustainable in the world. Our stewardship responsibility and management objective for Chinook and all salmon stocks is to work towards their recovery and rebuilding to support a thriving traditional fishery,

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with resiliency through biodiversity and protection of all stocks. We are pro-actively exploring strategic emergency enhancement approaches and will work with our partners to implement management measures to mitigate extirpation risk and facilitate rebuilding and recovery. The only way to meaningfully address this is to work together, based on the recognition of our Title and Rights, and our common interests. Therefore, we call on DFO to work with our Nation as partners to address this dire situation and recover and rebuild Chinook stocks in the Fraser River as a priority for the Tsilhqot'in people as well as our fellow Canadians.

**Quotes:**

**Nits'il?in (Chief) Jimmy Lulua, Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government:**

"Our Nation will not continue to stand by while these stocks decline towards extirpation, and with it the extinguishment of our rights and cultural practices. DFO needs to understand that as stewards of our Territories, our priority is to recover these stocks to support a thriving fishery, as a central component of our cultural identity. We invite Fisheries Minister Jordan to visit our Nation and Declared title lands this summer so that they may better understand the profound significance and cultural importance of this fishery."

**Nits'il?in (Chief) Francis Laceese, Tl'esqox First Nation:**

"We have engaged the international community with the serious matter our Nation faces in terms of food security. DFO has left us no choice but to exhaust every avenue to ensure these stocks are rebuilt and recovered so that our people can continue to live off the land and waters as our people have since time immemorial. It is time for DFO to start matching their words to action, and work hand in hand with us to implement the actions needed for our stocks to recover and thrive."

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