

June 22, 2024

STATEMENT ON FEDERAL BC SALMON FARMING ANNOUNCEMENT

BY THE NATIONAL CIRCLE FOR INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURE AND FOOD (NCIAF)

The NCIAF is a national non-profit organization created for Indigenous Agriculture and Food that is generating opportunities for proponents of change to have a real and positive impact in supporting Indigenous communities and people in Canada's agriculture and food industry. The NCIAF is intended to help build relationships and network, find partners and provide access to leading knowledge and opportunities.

Our purpose:

- To galvanize a community of partners to support Indigenous Peoples and reignite their role in agriculture and food through knowledge sharing and supporting business creation, while honoring Indigenous values, lands, and Mother Earth.
- Advance reconciliation and building of bridges between Indigenous communities and other agriculture and food industry stakeholders to create a shared national vision for Indigenous agriculture.
- Support the development of Indigenous agriculture and food businesses, focusing on food security and sovereignty.
- Build Indigenous capacity for agriculture through awareness of opportunities, knowledge exchange, and education and skills development.

We are genuinely concerned about the federal government's recent objective announcement of "banning open-net pen salmon farms in BC coastal waters by 2029." This decision has triggered a backlash from First Nation leaders, the industry, and food and fishery experts and will impact over 5,000 jobs in BC and will have adverse ripple effects on food security across the country.

"Many First Nations, like the Kitasoo Xai'xais, see ocean-based salmon farming as vital to ensuring food security, economic opportunities, and cultural revitalization for their communities. For many, salmon farming has been a transformative force, especially for some communities devastated by centuries of forced assimilation, land theft, genocide, and colonization." Emily Desousa, a fisheries scientist and a research consultant for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), where her work focuses on small-scale fisheries and international trade. She is also the owner of InnaSea Media.

Link to Emily Desousa's story on the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation; [Behind one First Nation's fight to keep its salmon farms afloat - Responsible Seafood Advocate \(globalseafood.org\)](https://globalseafood.org/behind-one-first-nation-s-fight-to-keep-its-salmon-farms-a-float-responsible-seafood-advocate)

Isaiah Robinson, Deputy Chief Councillor of Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation shared following the recent federal government announcement, "this decision was not based on science, or the comprehensive 1.5-year transition plans each Nation developed to guide the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. These plans were created with the understanding that they would provide a framework for a responsible transition. This decision was driven not by these well-thought-out plans but by politics. This is a political decision not based on science or fact."

Keith Currie, President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture shared, "This decision threatens the future of thousands of workers, approximately 700 of which are held by Indigenous peoples, will take away \$1.2 billion in economic output, and hinder ongoing investment in improved environmental performance."

On Wednesday, June 19, Diane Lebouthillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard, announced in Ottawa the Government of Canada ban on open net-pen salmon aquaculture in British Columbia coastal waters by June 30, 2029, based on a "a path forward for salmon aquaculture." Meanwhile in Vancouver, Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources invited members of the anti-salmon farming activist groups to join him in making the ban announcement, and not the First Nations directly impacted by the decision with focus on "wild Pacific Salmon protection." This inconsistency in messaging is troubling and indicates communication and honest engagement is lacking with those most affected by this decision. *"It is dangerous to make decisions based on activism rather than science,"* said Dr. Sylvain Charlebois, an expert in the area of food distribution, security and safety and Director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University. Dr Charlebois called on all Canadians and British Columbians to support in calling the government to choose a balanced pathway.

"There are over one thousand distinct supply companies involved in BC salmon farming. Many of these also service Atlantic Canada and rely on a strong sector to grow Canadian jobs across Canada. BC's historically largest agricultural export touches so many people's lives: farming and food production, including food retail and service, health companies, food banks, food processors, local auto dealers, feed manufacturers, and grain growers, just to name a few. Canadian salmon feed companies purchase close to \$150 million annually from Canadian grain and protein suppliers, supporting a circular economy with the potential for significant value-added growth." Agriculture Suppliers Community, June 19, 2024, statement.

The BC Farmers Association shared “this decision undermines the federal government's commitment to science-based decision-making, restoration of wild salmon populations, support for UNDRIP and rural coastal communities, growth of Canada's Blue Economy, increased food security, and support for young Canadians, the organization says. This focus on unproven technology jeopardizes the sector’s ability to fulfill agreements with rights-holder First Nations and will cause further harm to our communities.”

The FinFish Stewardship response to the announcement, “This decision felt like a step backwards towards our economic empowerment.” The Coalition for Finfish Stewardship released a statement on National Indigenous Peoples Day, demanding an apology to BC First Nations from William Shatner and Ryan Reynolds for their parts in the now viral Pacific Wild video telling salmon farms to “f*** off.” The Finfish Stewardship called the video an “atrocious attack” of the dignity of members who “choose to host salmon farming” in their territorial waters. “Due to the impact of colonization on wild salmon stocks, we have had to include salmon farming alongside salmon stewardship to fill the economic gap caused by the decline of wild salmon.”

NCIAF President and CEO, Kallie Wood “The NCIAF supports the conversations for economic self-determination, rights, title, and sovereign decision-making authority as Indigenous Peoples. We encourage the federal government to ensure that all voices needed around the table are present and heard for the pathway forward. Salmon farming is highly regulated in Canada. It has reached a significant milestone, whereby 100% of the remaining farm production is under agreement with local rights-holder First Nations. We celebrate this with our relatives on the West Coast and implore the government to revisit this decision and not repeat the mistakes of the past. The Government of Canada states it is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change. This has dramatically lacked in this recent announcement. Let’s join together and move forward in a good way by honoring the wisdom of First Nation voices who have been the stewards of our lands, waters, and elements since time immemorial by respecting Mother Earth, while acknowledging the insights and knowledge of western science voices that know the intricacies of salmon farms and can provide the research, data, and analytics to support a reconciled pathway forward. Hearsay, activism, and negative messaging doesn’t contribute positively to the process of reconciliation. It is important for us to engage in open dialogue, attentively listen, and learn from each another.”

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