



FIRST NATIONS FISHERIES COUNCIL

of British Columbia

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Wednesday, April 1, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FNFC Supports Heiltsuk Opposition to Commercial Herring Roe Fishery

(Coast Salish Territory/West Vancouver, BC – April 1, 2015) The First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia expresses its support for the Heiltsuk First Nation's efforts to stop the commercial herring sac roe fishery in their territory, and their assertion of their inherent aboriginal rights to manage their fisheries. Herring is a dietary staple for Central Coast First Nations, and is a very important fish to the Heiltsuk nutritionally, culturally, and economically. The FNFC encourages DFO to work with the Heiltsuk First Nation to develop a mutually agreeable resolution to the issue, and to commit to developing collaborative management and decision making frameworks for science, monitoring, and stock management for the future.

Penny White, the Central Coast delegate for the FNFC, explained the herring issue and the concerns of First Nations in the region. "The position of the Central Coast First Nations is that a sustainable commercial herring roe fishery, in areas not essential to the Nations, can be supported when the stocks are healthy," she said. "The stocks have not rebuilt enough to withstand a commercial herring kill fishery. This is something everyone in BC should care about, not only because it affects people so deeply, but also because herring are essential to ecosystem health."

She continued, "One major issue is that the herring spawn-on-kelp and herring roe commercial fisheries are treated as having equal impacts on the stocks. However, the spawn-on-kelp fishery allows the fish to return the next year and spawn again, and the herring roe fishery kills the fish for the eggs still inside. Secondly, central coast herring stocks are treated as a single stock, and the local people know this to be false. In the federally led science on the stock genetics of herring in BC, the Central Coast is singled out as uncertain. Yet despite the uncertainty, DFO managers assume the central coast stocks can be treated as an aggregate. These two major issues have been concerns since the inception of commercial fishing on the central coast, and the First Nations have been working tirelessly to remedy these with little support from the federal government agencies."

FNFC Executive Director Jordan Point said "It is unfortunate that the Heiltsuk have had to resort to direct action in an attempt to protect the herring biomass in their traditional lands. For two years they and other west coast First Nations have been urging the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to exercise caution when considering the open areas for the commercial herring fishery. The Gladstone decision

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recognised and affirmed the Aboriginal Right to harvest herring roe on kelp. It is the impact on the availability of roe that may potentially be lost in a commercial fishery, which identifies the rationale for why the Heiltsuk are protesting the current openings: to ensure that their Aboriginal Rights-based harvest maintains in its rightful place of priority, as set out in case law, and that the brunt of conservation is borne by other fisheries. This principle is consistent with existing jurisprudence. As part of the inherent right to govern, the Heiltsuk have always honoured, protected, managed, and used herring in their homes to nourish their families. The herring is a foundation of the First Nations fishing culture and economy on the Central Coast, and we support their fight to protect this valuable resource.”

FNFC Chair Ken Malloway said “We support the Heiltsuk First Nation as they assert their inherent Aboriginal Right to protect the aquatic resources in their territory. BC First Nations have a responsibility as the managers and guardians of their lands and waters. We stand with the Heiltsuk and call upon DFO to close the herring sac roe fishery, and urge DFO to work with Heiltsuk in a meaningful way as talks continue.”

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Background:

The First Nations Fisheries Council was established in 2007 to implement the *First Nations Fisheries Action Plan*, an agenda for action in the Pacific fishery for BC First Nations. The *Action Plan's* vision includes all First Nations in BC working together to address issues of shared concern in the fishery, and to enhance the well-being of communities. The plan calls for maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems and species and restoring them as necessary while sharing management responsibility based on ownership of territories and the inherent Rights of First Nations. The council works with governments and stakeholders to ensure recognition and respect of First Nations' Title and Rights and to improve the conservation and management of the resource.