



PRESS RELEASE

## **BC fishermen, local governments, and allies push for reform to West Coast fisheries policy to support coastal communities**

**March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020** - On February 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, BC fish harvesters from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, academics, NGOs, industry associations, First Nations leaders, local, provincial and federal governments, and policymakers gathered in Nanaimo for the second Fisheries for Communities Gathering. They convened to continue pursuing a policy framework for BC fisheries that ensures the value of BC's seafood flows to the people on deck, on the dock, and in their BC coastal communities and First Nations instead of lining the pockets of investors or large-scale corporations. Gathering participants called on the Federal and Provincial governments for action on the 20 recommendations made – with unanimous support – by the federal Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (FOPO) in May 2019 to correct currently broken fisheries licencing policies. The diversity, cooperation, and unity among those at the Gathering reflected a common frustration with the current system and need for reform.

Most BC fisheries are managed through an unregulated market for licences and individual transferrable quotas where anyone, including speculative investors and multinational corporations, can own access rights to BC West Coast fisheries. They can then lease their quota and licences – which are often worth hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars – to fish harvesters before the fishing season for an upfront price. These fees can reach up to 85 percent of the estimated value of the fish, leaving fish harvesters struggling financially and often unable to even cover basic operating costs after paying these lease fees.

Without access to the full value of the fish they catch, fish harvesters are prevented from reinvesting in their crews, families, and adjacent communities. It impacts not just their income but also their communities' food security, health, ability to sustain intergenerational knowledge, local stewardship and traditional marine knowledge, culture, and ecosystem well-being.

The second Fisheries for Communities Gathering provided a forum that brought together people from a range of personal, professional, and political backgrounds to discuss and take action on these issues and push for needed change. As was made clear from participants' stories, this broken system must be changed to ensure the future health, sustainability, and resilience of BC coastal and First Nations communities.

Despite the adversity experienced by those in attendance as a result of this system, people were hopeful. Presentations by guests from Eastern Canada, Alaska, and Rhode Island described alternative management strategies that have successfully prevented fleet consolidation and financial speculation in the industry.

There are Canadian regulatory and legislative precedents for these kinds of protections: In June 2019, the last federal government passed Bill C-68, which allows key owner-operator and fleet-separation policies that have been in place in Atlantic Canada for decades, to be enshrined in regulation under the Fisheries Act. This piece of legislation leaves the door open to reform in the West Coast system. The owner-operator policy requires fish harvesters to personally fish their licences to ensure those who actively fish fully benefit from their licences while the fleet-separation policy separates the fishing and fish processing sectors. West coast harvesters and communities deserve equivalent protections against corporate consolidation and speculation as their Atlantic counterparts.



The new FOPO committee is supportive of implementing these changes. Two of its members – Ken Hardie, MP for Fleetwood-Kells, and Gord Johns, MP for Courtenay-Alberni – were in attendance to speak on the findings of their study, and to hear from fish harvesters and other community members. The Hon. Lana Popham, BC Minister of Agriculture, also attended the Gathering to express provincial support for BC fisheries and the role the Province can play in supporting the necessary legislative, policy and programmatic changes.

### Quotes

“West Coast fishers have demonstrated a very strong, collaborative approach to system reforms that aim to see all players receive equitable treatment in sharing the risks and rewards of our fishery. Fisheries for Communities representatives provided substantial input to the FOPO Committee report and recommendations. Now, the new Standing Committee in the 43rd Parliament has voted unanimously to re-table that report, which will prompt the DFO to seriously consider the changes fishers strongly support,” says **MP Ken Hardie (Fleetwood-Port Kells)**.

“The Fisheries for Communities Gathering 2.0 was a collection of strong voices from First Nations, industry, environmental and government leaders, all united by a shared commitment to support B.C.’s wild fisheries and the communities who depend on them,” says **the Hon. Lana Popham, B.C. Minister of Agriculture**. “The consensus was clear, for the sake of future generations and coastal ecosystems in the general, we must focus our effort on restoring wild salmon stocks, and increasing abundance and long-term sustainability of the fisheries, as well as supporting the people who make their living from the sea while this work is underway.”

“It’s very difficult for young harvesters to buy in start a career at the present time while the current fleet is aging out, with few replacements. Young harvesters looking to get in have been a driving force behind these recommendations, and we want to do it sooner than later, before our mentors retire. We don’t want to have to change careers and lose that inter-generational knowledge that’s so important to our future success,” says **James Lawson, a young harvester from Campbell River**.

### Background

The Fisheries for Communities Gathering 2.0 is building off of the first gathering, which was the largest of its kind since the 1990s, and contributed to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (FOPO) review of West Coast fisheries and the following report entitled “[West Coast Fisheries: Sharing Risks and Benefits](#)” that included 20 recommendations to government to change its current management of commercial fisheries in BC.

### About Fisheries for Communities

Fisheries for Communities is a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous fish and shellfish harvesters, small businesses, fishmongers, fish harvester organizations, NGO’s, and allied community groups and individuals. We are frustrated with the continued destruction of our shared resource, coastal communities that are becoming ghost towns, and the corporatization and Wall Street style selling and trading of seafood access on our coast. For more info go to <https://www.fisheriesforcommunities.org/>

### Fisheries for Communities Gathering 2.0 Facilitators

Ecotrust Canada facilitated the gathering with the support of the TBuck Suzuki Foundation and many other groups and individuals, on behalf of the Fisheries for Communities Network and those working to



find a common focus and voice on the barriers to thriving, sustainable coastal fisheries and more equitable access to the wealth of the oceans.

For more information:

Marc Fawcett-Atkinson – Communications, T. Buck Suzuki

T: 902-318-1923

E: [marc@bucksuzuki.org](mailto:marc@bucksuzuki.org)

Shannon Lough – Communications, Ecotrust Canada

T:250-640-4535

E: [shannon@ecotrust.ca](mailto:shannon@ecotrust.ca)