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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First Nations, Scientists And Conservationists Call For Swift Action By Fisheries Minister To Scale Up Fish Protection

Vancouver, BC, Coast Salish Territories – In a brief released today, West Coast Environmental Law, supported by First Nations, scientists and conservation groups, is calling for Canada’s Fisheries Minister to act immediately on his mandate to “restore lost protections” for fish habitat gutted by the former Conservative government.

Nearly fifty signees in an open letter accompanying the brief, including noted scientists, the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, are asking Fisheries and Oceans Minister Hunter Tootoo to reinstate habitat protection and ‘scale up’ Canada’s *Fisheries Act* to modernize the 150-year-old legislation.

“It’s a huge relief to see the Minister’s mandate direct from the Prime Minister is to ensure that fisheries and their habitat remain healthy for future generations,” says Linda Nowlan, staff counsel for West Coast Environmental Law. “The federal government can act now to put the guts back into the *Fisheries Act* by restoring full habitat protection.”

Released during Canada Water Week and the United Nations World Water Day, *Scaling Up the Fisheries Act* recommends an immediate repeal of controversial changes to fisheries law made by the previous federal government. In 2012, four former federal fisheries ministers and 600 Canadian and international scientists decried omnibus Bill C-38 that weakened fish habitat protection and removed safeguards for more than 130 freshwater and marine fish species at risk in Canada.

Nowlan says restoring the section of the law known as HADD – which prohibits *harmful alteration, disruption or destruction* of fish habitat– is widely supported by First Nations, fishers, anglers, scientists, conservation groups and coastal communities, and does not require prolonged consultation.

Citing habitat destruction as the most common cause of species decline, the brief also calls for the Minister to modernize the Act, building on previous fisheries reform efforts that came to a halt in 2012.

Recommendations include recognizing Indigenous rights, strengthening monitoring and enforcement, and protecting ecologically significant areas to ensure healthy fish populations.

Quotes

“Restoring the *Fisheries Act*, which was gutted by the Harper government, is key to developing a new relationship with First Nations. Our Aboriginal Rights are well established for government to respect and is fundamental to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Government’s commitment to

a new relationship with First Nations. His commitment to enacting the Cohen Commission report is a very positive step forward in developing a new path with First Nations, but this commitment must embrace and enact the ‘principles’ found within the recommendations.”
Chief Robert Chamberlin, Vice President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

“The Liberal Government has also committed to the implementation of research, restoration and management recommendations that are contained in the Special Report on Wild Atlantic Salmon in Eastern Canada presented to Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 2015. Strong habitat protection is essential if we are going to succeed in reversing the long-term decline in numbers of wild Atlantic salmon.”

Sue Scott, Vice-President of Communications for the Atlantic Salmon Federation.

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Links:

Brief: *Scaling up the Fisheries Act*

<http://wcel.org/sites/default/files/publications/ScalingUpTheFisheriesAct.pdf>

Fisheries Minister Hunter Tootoo’s Mandate Letter

<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-fisheries-oceans-and-canadian-coast-guard-mandate-letter>

Letter to Minister Tootoo dated March 14, 2016, signed by 47 organizations

<http://fisheriesact.ca/sign-on-letter-march-2016.pdf>

West Coast Environmental Law website: <http://wcel.org/>

WCEL Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WCELaw/>

WCEL Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WCELaw>

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Media spokespeople will be available for English and French language interviews in BC, Ontario and New Brunswick.