

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

FOUNDING HEAD OFFICE
209 - 345 Yellowhead Highway
Kamloops, B.C. V2H 1H1
Tel: 250-828-9746
Fax: 250-828-0319



VANCOUVER OFFICE
5th Floor, 342 Water Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1B6
Tel: 604-684-0231
Fax: 604-684-5726
1-800-793-9701
Email: ubcic@ubcic.bc.ca
Web: www.ubcic.bc.ca

NEWS RELEASE

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Union of BC Indian Chiefs Calls on the Harper Government to Act Immediately on the Highly Contagious Marine Influenza Virus, Infectious Salmon Anaemia

(Coast Salish Territory / Vancouver BC, October 20, 2011) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs is extremely worried about the disturbing findings of Simon Fraser University professor Rick Routledge and biologist Alexander Morton who announced earlier this week that sockeye smolts from Rivers Inlet have tested positive for a strain of Infectious Salmon Anaemia (ISA). The most troubling aspect of their announcement is the identification of this strain as the European strain of the ISA virus by Dr. Fred Kibenge, of the ISA reference laboratory at the Atlantic Veterinary College in P.E.I.

“Wild salmon is central and integral to who we are as Indigenous Peoples. With this startling announcement, it is imperative for the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans to take action. The scientists have stated that this virus is highly contagious. It would be ill-advised for DFO Minister Keith Ashfield and Prime Minister Stephen Harper to wait for the recommendations of the Cohen Commission to counter this virus emergency. At the very least, as a responsible proactive measure, the Harper Government should immediately provide emergency funding for comprehensive testing to find out how wide-spread the virus is,” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

Chief Bob Chamberlin, Vice-President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated “The top priority of DFO should be the protection of wild salmon as per their own Wild Salmon Policy. DFO cannot ignore the fact that the only possible source of the European strain of ISA is Atlantic salmon fish farms. DFO cannot continue to be blinded by their insidious relationship with the fish farm industry. We as Indigenous Peoples, British Columbians and Canadians must act now because we cannot afford to allow ISA to take away our children’s birthright.”

Chief Chamberlin further stated “With ISA now identified in wild salmon, we must take the utmost precautionary measures along the whole coast. As such the Kwikwasutinuxw-Haxwa’mis First Nation demands all fish farm Atlantic salmon in our territory be removed immediately.”

Chief Jonathan Kruger of the Penticton Indian Band expressed concerns stating “The Penticton Indian Band has devoted considerable time and significant resources to revive the wild salmon runs in our territory. As a community, we have relied on wild salmon since time immemorial and it is deeply disturbing to hear the horrific news that this deadly virus ISA has been found in wild salmon.”

Chief Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair of the Tsilhqot'in National Government, remarked “ISA is a huge concern for the Tsilhqot'in National Government as we are home to the most consistent sockeye run in the Fraser River Basin, the Chilko Lake salmon run. The Tsilhqot'in National Government continues to work hard to assess, catalogue and to further enhance the Chilko Lake salmon runs. It is a fact that the salmon spawning in the Upper Fraser are more prone to disease and mortality. It is time for DFO to stop experimenting with fish farms and with our wild salmon. It is time to do away with fish farms.”

Grand Chief Phillip concluded “What we fear is that the Harper Government will protect third-party interests at the expense of biodiversity and the constitutionally protected rights of Indigenous Peoples. As such, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs will continue to fully support any and all Indigenous communities who choose to pursue all available steps to ensure that their rights are recognized, respected and protected.”

Media inquires:

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Phone: (250) 490-5314

Chief Bob Chamberlin, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Phone: (778) 988-9282