



STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Federal Government unjustifiably withholds scientific report for 10 years

(X̱m̱əθḵʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish) and s̱əlilw̱ətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC) -

The First Nation Wild Salmon Alliance (“FNWSA”) is deeply troubled with the revelations set out in an article featured on the front page of today’s Globe and Mail which identifies that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (“DFO”), under the Harper administration, withheld critical science related to the existence of a highly transmissible PRV virus among open-net fish farms for over 10 years. The article also raises the issue that Dr. Kristi Miller-Saunders, a senior research scientist at the DFO, was unable to disclose the results of her study which gave rise to the final report in question.

As Dr. Miller-Saunders notes, “It is really a travesty that the study could not come to light 10 years ago, and that the findings associated with this virus have been so contentious in Canada, as the role that this virus plays in disease development in salmon in other countries is not disputed”.

The B.C. based organization, Wild First, filed an access-to-information request for information held by the DFO in relation to open-net pen fish farms back in 2014 and went on to bring this matter the attention of Canada’s Privacy Commissioner who later ordered the release of the science paper. The FNWSA takes exception to the withholding of such critical information and deems it utterly unacceptable that the report was not released until March 18, 2022.

We understand that the scientific information withheld by the DFO clearly conveys information that does not support the DFO’s mandate to advance the open-net pen fish farm industry, leaving us with an open question about the integrity of decision-makers within the federal government system. The deliberate decision and intentional action of taking steps to withhold scientific information which may have changed the course of our collective understanding at an early stage about the impacts of the PRV virus on wild salmon are acts against science and an obvious disregard for the constitutionally-protected Aboriginal rights to wild salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes. From the perspective of the FNWSA, such decisions create and foster a climate of distrust and broken relationships.

“This latest development is an opportunity for the Office of the Auditor General of Canada to revisit its 2018 report on the Salmon Farming Aquaculture Industry, disease/pathogens and the role the DFO. Although these federal decisions and actions originated under the Harper regime, it also provides an opportunity for the Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to take meaningful and positive steps to correct the suppression of science and to build a better path forward for all” says Robert Chamberlin, FNWSA Chair

For more information, contact:

Robert Chamberlin, FNWSA Chair

Tel: 778.828.9792