

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

February 8, 2023

FNLC Congratulates 15 First Nations, Governments of BC and Canada on Announcement of Joint Accomplishments Toward Protecting BC's North Coast

Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC – On February 5, 2023, at the Fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5), 15 First Nations jointly announced two commendable initiatives alongside the provincial and federal governments regarding the protection of the northern third of Canada's West Coast.

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) expresses profound congratulations and acknowledges the hard work undertaken by Gitga'at, Gitxaala, Haisla, Kitselas, Kitsumkalum, Metlakatla, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo Xai'xais, Nuxalk, Wuikinuxv, Mamalilikulla, Kwiakah, Tlowitsis, and Wei Wai Kum First Nations, and the Council of the Haida Nation on the endorsement of their Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Action Plan for the Northern Shelf Bioregion (NSB), which extends from the northern tip of Vancouver Island up to the Canada-Alaska border beyond Haida Gwaii. Additionally, the FNLC also calls upon the Governments of BC and Canada to urgently take further actions, in partnership with First Nations, to preserve marine resources for future generations and prevent the extinction of irreplaceable wild stocks.

After more than a decade of work with the Province and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), this MPA Network Action Plan outlines a strategic approach to developing an extensive network of marine protected areas along BC's north coast, highlighting First Nations' persistence and dedication to this vital work. The Action Plan includes a recommended design for the MPA network, suggestions for potential designation tools, conservation objectives, and implementation timelines to conserve future sites.

Furthermore, the FNLC extends congratulations to Mamalilikulla First Nation for establishing the first protected marine refuge to be recognized through the Northern Shelf Bioregion MPA Network planning process, representing years of work between the Nation, BC, and Canada. At IMPAC5, Chief John Powell (Winidi) was joined by Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, and Nathan Cullen, BC Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, to announce the historic formation of a marine refuge to protect Gwaxdlala/Nalaxdlala – also known as Lull Bay and Hoeya Sound – in Knight Inlet, British Columbia.

This marine refuge will help provide long-term protection to the ecologically and culturally significant area of Gwaxdlala/Nalaxdlala, which includes a globally unique ecosystem of fragile and slow-growing corals and sponges that provide key habitat for more than 240 other marine species.

BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Terry Teegee stated, "First Nations peoples have been stewards of these lands and waters since time immemorial. Together with our non-Indigenous neighbours and partners, we share in the responsibility to protect special marine areas and ensure these vital ecosystems can thrive for generations to come. I am incredibly proud to see this meaningful, tangible work being accomplished by First Nations in BC in partnership with the provincial and federal governments. If we are to achieve Canada's goal of conserving 30 percent of land and water by 2030, then we must continue on this path of collaboration, sustainability, and upholding Indigenous values, expertise, and sovereignty."



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd.
Prince George, BC
V2K 5S3

Ph: 778-945-9910
Fx: 778-945-9916



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 – 312 Main Street
Vancouver, BC
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated, “While we welcome this announcement and all actions that protect, preserve, and restore our invaluable oceans and marine life in collaboration with title and rights holders, this is not enough. The BC and Canadian governments have long neglected and mismanaged these resources, causing immeasurable damage, devastating wild stocks, and infringing upon First Nations’ rights. We call upon BC and Canada to ensure that this is simply the first of many rapidly implemented and co-managed MPAs as well as systemic change in the approach to fisheries and oceans management, in alignment with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.”

“We commend the collaborative efforts of the fifteen BC First Nations and the Governments of Canada and British Columbia for working together to establish a protection plan for the Northern Shelf Bioregion of BC. The conservation and protection of our biodiverse ecosystem and its natural resources, especially our sea resources, is of critical importance for BC First Nations; it is at the heart of who we are as Indigenous peoples. We hope this plan will be the first step towards establishing similar protection plans up and down the coast of BC. We must collectively work together, per the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to protect our ecosystems from the constant threats brought on by pollution and global climate change. This agreement underscores the importance of government-to-government collaboration and cooperation under the guidance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” said Hugh Braker of the First Nations Summit Political Executive.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

For further information, please contact:

Colin Braker, First Nations Summit:	(604) 328-4094
Annette Schroeter, BC Assembly of First Nations:	(778) 281-1655
Ellena Neel, Union of BC Indian Chiefs:	(778) 866-0548