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BC First Nations Offer Support to Trudeau Government in Fulfilling Federal Commitment to Pacific North Coast Oil Tanker Moratorium

SAIK'UZ FIRST NATION, BRITISH COLUMBIA/YINKA DENE TERRITORIES (Dec. 16, 2015) -

Today First Nations leaders in British Columbia offered the Trudeau government their support in implementing an oil tanker moratorium on British Columbia's north coast. The announcement comes on the fifth anniversary of the Save the Fraser Declaration, an Indigenous law declaration signed by representatives of more than 100 First Nations that prohibits oil megaprojects in signatories' territories.

"A federal moratorium would protect not only the ocean, but also our lands, freshwater and the plants, animals and communities that depend on them," said Chief Stanley Thomas of Saik'uz First Nation, a member of the six-Nation Yinka Dene Alliance whose territories represent 25 percent of the proposed route of the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipelines. "We support the federal government on this. I think our boats are finally pointed in the right direction."

The Ministerial Mandate Letters for Minister of Transport Marc Garneau, as well as Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard Hunter Tootoo, direct that formalizing an oil tanker moratorium on BC's north coast is a top priority for the two Ministries.

"We have invested extensive resources and time to build a sustainable economy in our territories," said Marilyn Slett, Chief of the Heiltsuk Nation and President of Coastal First Nations, an alliance of First Nations along the north and central coast of BC. "An oil spill would devastate fishing, tourism, and traditional subsistence harvesting, which are the backbones of the economy in the North and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii." The Coastal First Nations declared a ban on oil tankers in their waters in 2010. "A federal moratorium on oil tankers on the north coast would complement our ban."

"First Nations in BC have spoken together in clearly saying no to the environmental risks that Northern Gateway represents," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "Now the federal government has created an opportunity to demonstrate that it is listening to First Nations by ensuring these types of projects no longer threaten the environment in the region. I encourage the federal government to seize that opportunity by enacting a strong and comprehensive oil tanker moratorium for the Pacific north coast. We only have one earth to take care of."

"The dispute between First Nations and the federal government over Northern Gateway has been prolonged and highly-charged, diverting resources away from the many other important issues in the region that require constructive, forward-looking dialogue," said Chief Fred Sam of the Nak'azdli Nation, which is also a member of the Yinka Dene Alliance. "I'm heartened that the federal government seems ready to move from promise to reality on an oil tanker moratorium on BC's north coast, which would put this toxic issue behind us and mark an important step in improving relations with First Nations."

CONTACT INFORMATION

Geraldine Thomas-Flurer
Yinka Dene Alliance Coordinator
250-570-1482

Marilyn Slett
Chief of the Heiltsuk Nation and
President of Coastal First Nations
250-957-7721