

OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER MARK CARNEY

On the Federal Commitment to End Open-Net Pen Salmon Farming in British Columbia by 2029

*Issued by Hupačasath Hawil (Hereditary Chief) Tsu Tsii In (Alton Watts), Hupacasath Nation,
Nuu-chah-nulth*

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Dear Prime Minister Carney,

In November 2025, hundreds of First Nations hereditary leaders, matriarchs, fisher families, and allies gathered in Hupacasath and Tseshaht territories at Port Alberni for a Migratory Salmon Potlatch. Nations came from across Vancouver Island, from the Interior, and as far as the Winnemem Wintu in northern California, who had just removed the dams on the Klamath River to bring their salmon home. Together, they signed a declaration: to relentlessly work toward the immediate removal of all open-net pen fish farms from our coastal waters.

I hosted that Potlatch. I am writing to you now because that declaration demands a response, and because the Government of Canada has already made a commitment that aligns with it. We are asking you to honour that commitment.

A Generation of Loss

For the Nuu-chah-nulth people, salmon are our relatives. They are teachers. They are the thread connecting our communities to our ancestors and to every generation that follows. When the salmon suffer, so do we, and the salmon are suffering.

BC's commercial salmon harvest is now 6% of what it was in the 1980s. The landed value, in real terms, is 2% of what it once was. First Nations fishing, the heartbeat of our food sovereignty and ceremonial life, has fallen by 90% in a single generation. In our communities, these are not statistics. They are a lived experience of loss felt in every ceremony, every gathering, every meal where salmon is absent.

At the Potlatch in Port Alberni, speaker after speaker returned to the same truth in their own words: that the fish carry a value no economic arrangement can replace, that the responsibility to future generations outweighs the comfort of the status quo, that the time for waiting has passed. Every word spoken carried reverence for the salmon, and duty to the generations that follow.

Our peoples have always known that salmon are the keystone of life on this coast. They carry the ocean into the rivers and forests; they feed the watersheds we all depend on. When the salmon

go, the rest follows. What reaches them now will reach all of our grandchildren, yours and ours alike.

Open-net pen salmon farming bears direct responsibility for accelerating that decline. It is also the one pressure on wild salmon that is entirely within the federal government's power to remove.

One Hundred and Twenty Nations Have Spoken

Some have characterized this as a divided issue, Nations against Nations, coastal communities pitted against each other. The reality is much more significant.

Over 120 First Nations across British Columbia have publicly called for an end to open-net pen farming. The Union of BC Indian Chiefs has passed 13 unanimous resolutions on this issue, not one dissenting vote, over 25 years. At the Potlatch in Port Alberni, hereditary leaders and matriarchs came forward from Nations whose own territories contain fish farms and signed the declaration knowing precisely what it means for their own communities. This consensus was built through ceremony, through relationship, and through a shared sense of responsibility that reaches well beyond any single generation or territory.

We hold deep respect for the Nations navigating difficult choices in difficult circumstances. The pull of economic partnership is powerful, particularly in communities where alternatives have been slow to materialize. And in that same spirit of respect, our position is firm: no Nation holds the authority to condemn salmon to extinction, and no short-term economic arrangement justifies passing that inheritance to our children.

An Industry in Managed Decline

We have heard the argument that removing open-net pens will cost jobs in remote coastal communities. We take the economic realities of those communities with complete seriousness, which is precisely why an accurate story of what is happening demands to be told.

The open-net pen sector has already shed nearly half its BC workforce in recent years, from over 6,000 jobs in 2020 to under 4,000 today, before the federal transition has taken effect. This industry is in managed decline. The question before you is whether to let that decline continue to zero, or to invest in building something larger, cleaner, and more deeply rooted in the communities that depend on a working coast.

We have already seen what the alternative looks like. The Kwakwaka'wakw Nations removed salmon farms from their waters. The salmon are returning to their streams. The orca are returning. The foundation of a coastal economy rooted in abundance rather than extraction is being laid in their territories, right now.

A wild salmon recovery economy, Indigenous and community-led, watershed by watershed, has the potential to employ thousands of British Columbians in meaningful year-round work: habitat restoration, monitoring, Guardians programs, land-based aquaculture, and blue economy development on converted marine sites. Washington State has demonstrated that every \$1 million invested in watershed restoration generates \$2.2 to \$2.5 million in economic activity. The modelling and the implementation frameworks already exist. Michelle Corfield, of Corfield & Associates, has spoken to this directly:

“Salmon are integral to Nuu-chah-nulth life. We have an inherent responsibility to ensure they have an environment in which they can thrive, from the rivers where they are born to the ocean they travel through. And when they thrive, everyone benefits. As we have seen in the Fraser, when runs return, abundance follows. In abundance, the debate over allocation disappears. Everybody wins.”

There Is No Safe Open-Net Pen

Some have argued that Indigenous-led advances in sea lice management make the removal of open-net pens unnecessary. We respect that science, and we respect the Nations who have pursued it. The peer-reviewed evidence, however, encompasses far more than sea lice alone.

Viruses and bacterial pathogens, including Piscine Orthoreovirus, Infectious Hematopoietic Necrosis Virus, and others documented extensively in the scientific literature, transfer freely from farmed Atlantic salmon to wild Pacific salmon through open water. No monitoring program, no management technology, and no governance structure applied to the existing system eliminates that transmission pathway. Closed containment on land severs it entirely. Reducing sea lice by 80% is a genuine achievement. The remaining 20%, and the full spectrum of pathogen transfer that sea lice management does not touch, still reaches the wild salmon on their way to sea. It is not enough.

A Commitment Demands a Plan

Prime Minister, we are asking you to honour the 2029 commitment, and to move immediately to the work that honouring it requires.

The deadline is three years away. What is needed now is a concrete, publicly available implementation plan that names the farms slated for removal, sets out the sequence and timeline, and provides support for affected workers and communities. The Broughton Archipelago transition demonstrated that an orderly, phased removal is achievable. Led by First Nations, respectful of industry operational realities, guided by science, that process worked. It is the model, and it should be applied coast-wide without further delay.

The Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative, renewed in April 2026, provides the foundation. The Keystone Fund and Salmon Canada frameworks show what building on that foundation could look like. The public support is well documented: 68% of British Columbians want this commitment kept, and 73% say they would trust the federal government less if it is not.

Prime Minister, we invite you to come to our territory. Stand with us at the rivers. See for yourself what we see every day and what that means to watch the salmon disappear from waters that once held them in abundance. No briefing, no report, no statistic can replace standing where the runs once filled the water and seeing what remains. You are welcome here. Come, and let us show you.

The Potlatch declaration has been signed and the salmon are waiting. It is time to act.

With respect and resolve,

Tsu Tsii In



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On behalf of the 2025 Migratory Salmon Declaration signatories