

## Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce

### Address to SFAB & Department of Fisheries & Oceans February 16, 2022

The Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce represents approximately 80 businesses with hundreds of employees. While this may seem small on the grand scale, it is the lifeblood of our community.

In 2018, the Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce in an Alliance with 25 other island chambers and the BC Chamber of Commerce engaged in meaningful dialogue with DFO regarding proposed restrictions and closures at that time. Through this work, the Thriving Orcas Thriving Communities Coalition was created. The coalition represents 36000 businesses in our Province. Our mandate was and still is to protect our endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) and at the same time preserve and protect the socio-economic fabric of our coastal communities. We have continued to communicate with SFAB and the SFAC executives since this time.

In 2018, coalition representatives met with the Honorable Jonathan Wilkinson Minister of Fisheries & Oceans, to discuss the protection of the SRKW and the protection of our endangered communities. Nothing has changed since then with respect to our coastal communities, especially as it currently relates to Port Renfrew and the proposed 2022 restrictions and closures in area 20-1, area 21 and area 121-1 and 121-2

The Recreational fishery contributes greater than 16 million dollars to the Port Renfrew economy and is the main revenue driver for accommodations restaurants and retailers. These are very significant inputs generating far-reaching economic spin-offs all along the value chain not only in Port Renfrew but across many communities on the Island and Lower Mainland. Province wide these numbers reach 1.1 billion dollars and support over 9000 jobs. The negative impacts expected from the currently proposed closures will be, without a doubt devastating to our community.

DFO's early release of an incomplete and ambiguous survey as a replacement for direct community consultation has already started an exodus of bookings which are causing significant 2022 revenue losses that are being realized by our operators and businesses. Actions such as these could be construed as a lack of

respect for the process, and some may characterize these actions as malicious. I am confident that this is not DFO's intention, however, it certainly comes across with a negative inference.

In reference to the Prime Minister's and the DFO Ministers' mandate to support the blue economy, the proposed closures of such vast fishing areas which are so vitally important to our local economy can only be interpreted as punitive in their intent. My question to you today is:

Is the Prime Minister's declaration of commitment to a "blue economy" reserved only for big business?

Every year over 13,000 major vessels including tankers, bulkers and cruise ships pass through these very same waters. However, these vessels are mandated only to slow down while the recreational fishery will be almost shut out by the current proposals. Your own science shows that the majority of this area in 20-1 has no foraging taking place yet DFO is proposing this to become a no fishing zone.

Your committee separates itself from the already restrictive closures and restrictions imposed upon our community through the efforts to protect the Fraser River Chinook salmon. These are not separate issues to our community and businesses. The layering effect of the 2022 SKRW proposal compounded with the already implemented Fraser River chinook measures compounded again with the devastating effects of covid 19 restrictions and closures may well deliver an economic knockout punch.

*Quote from Prime Minister Trudeau Dec 16, 2021 Letter to Minister Murray*

*As we have been reminded throughout the pandemic, adapting to change is not only something government should do, it is something government **must do**. As you work to fulfil our commitments, I expect you to actively consider new ideas and issues as they emerge, whether through public engagement, your work with Parliamentarians or advice from the public service*

*I ask that you achieve results for Canadians by delivering the following commitments.*

- *Continue working with business, academic institutions, non-profits, provincial and territorial governments, and Indigenous partners to grow Canada's ocean and freshwater economy and support the long-term sustainable growth of Canada's fish and seafood sector,*

Today I am here representing the Port Renfrew business community. I do however speak in solidarity with the other 25 Vancouver Island Chambers of Commerce many of which are listening in on this call. Also listening today are directors and policy advisors from the BC Chamber of Commerce.

The Port Renfrew business community is committed to the preservation of both iconic species, the SRKW and the Fraser chinook salmon. We are dedicated to do our part when science-based methods are utilized to protect and preserve both the endangered species and our endangered community. The blue economy must benefit all Canadians not just big business.

I ask that you understand 2 important factors:

1. Should the restrictions and closures move forward as currently proposed, Port Renfrew will be dealt a catastrophic blow from which it may not recover.
2. Go to the table and engage in meaningful constructive dialogue with the SFAB and SFAC and adopt their recommendations to create a science-based plan that makes sense.

**Our economic lives depend upon it.**

Karl Ablack, President

**Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce**

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