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## **Legislated oil tanker ban needed now, says delegation of First Nations, northerners, labour and environmental groups to federal Ministers**

OTTAWA – A diverse delegation of British Columbians and First Nations travelled to Ottawa this week to meet with the Ministers responsible for formalizing a federal ban on oil tanker traffic on British Columbia's north and central coast. The First Nations, community groups, labour organizations and environmental groups urged the Ministers to move quickly to introduce legislation to entrench a comprehensive oil tanker ban in law.

“Our delegation put forward a shared view of four essential requirements for the oil tanker ban,” said Gavin Smith of West Coast Environmental Law. “First, that the oil tanker ban should be formalized by an Act of Parliament. Second, that it should apply at minimum to all of the Hecate Strait, Dixon Entrance and Queen Charlotte Sound. Third, that it should be indefinite in duration. And finally that it should prohibit the bulk transport of all crude and refined oil products in tankers, while allowing for the continued supply of smaller amounts of essential fuels to coastal communities.”

Chief Marilyn Slett of the Heiltsuk First Nation had planned to accompany the delegation, but is instead fully occupied with the aftermath of the recent major fuel spill in Heiltsuk territory.

“The sinking of Kirby's tug Nathan E. Stewart in the waters of the Heiltsuk Nation demonstrates why we need an oil tanker ban that prohibits the bulk transport of crude and refined petroleum on the Pacific north coast,” said Slett, Chief Councilor of the Heiltsuk First Nation. “The significant damage already done by the diesel spill would have been unimaginably worse had a vessel transporting oil in bulk spilled its cargo. The sea is the root of our culture, our food, and our incomes. These waters are simply too precious to bear the risk of oil tanker spills.”

Geraldine Thomas-Flurer, coordinator for the Yinka Dene Alliance whose member First Nations' territories are located in north-central British Columbia, added that the Alliance fully supports the legislation of a strong federal oil tanker ban.

“A lasting federal ban on oil tanker traffic would be a welcome addition to the existing decision of Yinka Dene Alliance First Nations to prohibit the export of oil through our lands,” said Thomas-Flurer. “It would also confirm what we've known for a long time: unwanted oil megaprojects like Enbridge's Northern Gateway are not crossing our territories.”

Kim Olsen, President of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, said his members support an oil tanker ban because they are keenly aware of the toll that a large spill like the Exxon Valdez could take on fisheries.

“That spill wiped out a generation of fishermen and some of the stocks, like the herring in Prince William Sound, still haven’t recovered,” said Olsen. “For the handful of long-term jobs that such tanker projects might create, it’s not worth risking the thousands of jobs that depend on fisheries and tourism in this region.”

“Northern communities overwhelmingly support the oil tanker ban,” said Cheryl Brown of Douglas Channel Watch, a Kitimat community group that intervened to oppose the Northern Gateway pipeline and tanker project in the Joint Review Panel process. “Kitimat is the only community that held a plebiscite on Enbridge’s Northern Gateway, and we made an informed decision to overwhelmingly vote no. Kitimat is closely tied to industrial development, but we also hold deep values of protecting the water we depend on, and that means no oil tankers in our community.”

“We’ve been asking for a legislated ban on oil tanker traffic on the north and central coast ever since the Harper government began to deny the existence of the informal ban implemented by the government of Pierre Trudeau,” said Karen Wristen, Executive Director of Living Oceans Society. “Hecate Strait is the fourth most dangerous body of water in the world for navigation and there is no technology that would make it a safe place for oil tankers. And when a spill happens in waters like that, there’s no sense talking about cleanup—you can’t even keep oil confined so that it could be cleaned up. It will just spread far and wide, oiling coastlines and the sea-bottom and killing ocean life for miles around.”

The groups met with Transport Minister Marc Garneau, Fisheries Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr, who were jointly charged by their mandate letters from the Prime Minister with the responsibility to “formalize” the longstanding ban on oil tanker traffic.

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**Contact:**

Bess Brown, Coastal First Nations Communications Coordinator – 604-828-4621

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

Kim Olsen, President, United Fishermen and Allied Workers’ Union – 604-836-5570

Gavin Smith, Staff Counsel, West Coast Environmental Law Association – 778-882-4374

Karen Wristen, Executive Director, Living Oceans Society – 604-788-5634

Cheryl Brown, Douglas Channel Watch member – 250-975-0798