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Fisheries Investments and Jobs at Risk

Ottawa, ON— The Fisheries Council of Canada (FCC) today said future investments and jobs in fisheries are being compromised by a lack of clear federal decision making. The Council, which just concluded its Annual General meeting in Ottawa, is calling on the government to live up to its commitment for openness and transparency. “Decisions based on science, collaboration, openness and transparency, this is what the government promised the Canadian seafood sector,” said Bruce Chapman, a member from the Atlantic Coast, “instead we face extraordinary uncertainty with the hiring of new workers and hundreds of millions of dollars of investment now on hold.”

Members of FCC, mostly family-owned businesses, produce wild shrimp, scallops, salmon, lobster, crab, haddock, halibut, the Canadian seafood familiar to consumers in grocery stores and restaurants, as well as many other specialty products. The Canadian seafood industry creates 80,000 direct jobs, mainly in coastal and rural communities, and accounts for \$6.6 billion in exports. 80 per cent of Canadian wild seafood production by value is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, the international gold standard for measuring fishery sustainability.

“We need four things from government,” noted Christina Burridge, an FCC member from the Pacific Coast, “effective management of fish resources and habitat, secure licence and quota shares, a clear regulatory regime and access to export markets. Right now most of these are uncertain, particularly licence and quota shares, so lenders and people in the fishery including small family businesses and corporations, don’t know whether their investments will be undermined by government.” One example, she explained, is the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act expected later this year. The government of Canada consulted widely on restoring much-needed habitat protection through the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and directly with Canadians, then proposed a wide range of additional non-habitat changes to fisheries management and licencing policy without meaningful consultation.

“Our situation is worse than the proposed small business tax changes, said Bruce Chapman, “FCC and some of its members asked to testify before the Standing Committee; we were refused. These changes potentially represent the most significant shifts in Canadian fisheries management in generations and could derail growth and innovation in this industry. We were told in late August about the changes in

very general terms and asked to provide comments in less than three weeks.” Under the Fisheries Act, the government of Canada regulates fisheries through licencing restrictions and controls such as total allowable catches, time, and area and gear restrictions. While a licence is a privilege not property, it enables fishermen to invest in vessels, gear and technology, science and research, new products and new markets, all of which involve multi-year commitments.

“The Fisheries Act is just one of our worries. FCC members broadly support the government of Canada’s direction with marine protection and Reconciliation, and we are proud of our conservation record,” Christina Burrridge said, “but how we implement these directions needs careful policy development. Industry as well as other stakeholders need to be part of the process if these policies are to succeed. Right now we see middle class families, communities and even conservation of the resource at risk from government policies developed behind closed doors. We need meaningful dialogue before the government enacts fundamental changes.”

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Since the Council was established in 1915, the Fisheries Council of Canada has been the national voice for most of the major companies engaged in Canada’s commercial fisheries. Our members include small, medium and larger-sized companies that harvest fish in Canada’s three oceans and inland waters. Member companies are also processors who process the majority of Canada’s fish and seafood production. FCC members take pride in being key employers in their communities, providing jobs and creating an economic base for other local businesses.

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