Open Letter to the Honourable Joanne Thompson 2 December 2025
Minister of Fisheries

CC:
The Right Honourable Mark Carney, PC, OC, MP, Prime Minister of Canada
Annette Gibbons, Deputy Minister of Fisheries
Patrick Weiler, MP, FOPO Chair
Clifford Small, MP, Conservative Shadow Minister of Fisheries
Mel Arnold, MP, Conservative Associate Shadow Minister of Fisheries, FOPO Vice-Chair
Alexis Deschênes, MP, Bloc Québécois Fisheries and Oceans Critic, FOPO Vice-Chair
Gord Johns, MP, NDP Fisheries and Oceans Critic
Elizabeth May, OC, MP
The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, PC, MP
The Honourable Randene Neill, MLA, BC Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Lori Halls, Deputy Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
James Mack, Assistant Deputy Minister, WLRS
Charles Short, Executive Director, Coastal Marine Stewardship, WLRS
David Travia, Executive Director, Fisheries, Aquaculture and Wild Salmon Branch, WLRS
Anna Classen, Regional Director General, Pacific Region
David Didluck, Associate Regional Director General, Pacific Region
Steve Gotch, Senior Director, Operations, Pacific Region
Neil Davis, Regional Director, Fisheries Management, Pacific Region
Andrew Thomson, Regional Director, Science, Pacific Region
Jon Chamberlain, Acting Regional Director, Science, Pacific Region

Dear Minister Thompson,

We, the undersigned, urge you to revitalize wild Pacific salmon escapement monitoring. This is a critical matter for the health of wild salmon populations and the prosperity of the fisheries and communities that depend on them.

Counting spawning salmon as they return to their natal watersheds is the foundation of effective management, yet this foundation has collapsed. A recent study[1] found the last decade to be the worst on record for Pacific salmon escapement monitoring, with annual monitoring falling by half since the 1980s. Since 2010, over 40% of Conservation Units have lacked annual abundance estimates, severely undermining the department's ability to manage and assess populations. This year, your department failed to secure stable escapement monitoring contracts across the Pacific Region, leaving information gaps critical to tracking wild salmon health. Impending operational budget cuts threaten further erosion of population monitoring without your intervention.

[1] Atkinson, E., Carturan, B.S., Atkinson, C.P., Bateman, A., Connors, K., Hertz, E. and Peacock, S.J., 2025. Monitoring for fisheries or for fish? Declines in monitoring of salmon spawners continue despite a conservation crisis. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, 82: 1-18.

The consequences of declines in population monitoring impact everyone connected to wild salmon. Without quality-controlled, publicly accessible escapement data, salmon stewards and researchers, including those within your department, cannot track population status, assess environmental stressors, evaluate recovery efforts, or inform fisheries management. Inadequate escapement monitoring severely undermines First Nations' fisheries management, cultural practices, and food security objectives. Commercial fishermen already suffer economic impacts, forced to preemptively withdraw from Marine Stewardship Council certification in 2022, primarily due to the department's inability to meet minimum stock assessment requirements. As a direct result, commercial fishermen struggle to find buyers or command fair prices for their catch, leading to millions of dollars in losses. Recreational fisheries are directly affected, as lack of escapement monitoring has negatively influenced the timing and extent of multiple recreational closures in recent years. Critical to all groups, inadequate monitoring will undermine Canada's ability to secure improved terms in the upcoming renegotiation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty with the United States.

Rebuilding escapement monitoring capacity would not only fulfill the department's core functions and conservation obligations under the Wild Salmon Policy, but it would also support coastal communities that depend on salmon. This is a uniquely unifying issue, with broad support from First Nations, commercial and recreational fishers, environmental non-profits, academics, and citizens across the political spectrum.

In light of this, we call on your office to:

1. **Provide stable funding** and personnel for escapement monitoring and data management amid impending budget cuts.
2. **Revitalize investment** in NuSEDs as a public, central database of local-scale spawner abundance data.
3. **Issue a clear mandate** to your department to prioritize escapement monitoring, emphasizing both on-the-ground work and database management.
4. **Immediately engage** with rightsholders and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive, forward thinking stock assessment framework for the entire Pacific Region that will guide future expansions in escapement monitoring.

Salmon are central to our cultures, economies, and ecosystems. Restoring escapement monitoring is essential to give them a fighting chance. We look forward to your response and the opportunity to collaborate on solutions.

Sincerely,

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BC Federation of Drift Fishers

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Nick Chowdhury
President
Island Marine Aquatic Working Group

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