



## News Release

For immediate release

### **VANCOUVER ISLAND CHAMBERS UNITE TO PROTECT MARINE-BASED TOURISM FOLLOWING FEDERAL SRKW CRITICAL HABITAT ZONE EXTENSION**

Coastal communities warn potential closures could have devastating effects on local economies

VICTORIA, B.C. (Dec. 6, 2018) – Following the federal government’s designation of a 5,025-square kilometer Northern and Southern Resident Killer Whale critical habitat (CH) zone off the southwest coast of Vancouver Island, 17 Island Chambers of Commerce have united to protect the marine-based tourism on which they depend and urge the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to carefully weigh potential management measures that could harm their coastal communities, destroy thousands of business and jobs, and impact tourism revenue across Vancouver Island.

The new critical habitat zone is an extension of the zone in the Juan de Fuca Strait. Recreational fishing restrictions placed on portions of that zone this spring seriously impacted marine-based tourism and associated land-based economic activities, including employment, in Sooke. It is now feared that the extension of the zone northward past Ucluelet and 60 km out to sea could lead to a closure of recreational fishing at the La Perouse and Swiftsure banks on which several Vancouver Island communities depend.

In an effort to protect their communities, the Chambers of Alberni Valley, Bamfield, Campbell River, Chemainus & District, Comox Valley, Duncan-Cowichan, Ladysmith, Greater Nanaimo, Parksville & District, Port Hardy, Port McNeill & District, Port Renfrew, Qualicum Beach, Sooke, Tofino-Long Beach, Ucluelet and WestShore have united to form a coalition called *Thriving Orcas, Thriving Coastal Communities*.

Collectively, the Chambers’ coalition represents more than three thousand businesses across Vancouver Island that depend directly or indirectly on marine-based tourism and the induced spending around these activities. As communities that have only recently battled back from forestry and commercial fishing closures to reach a level of economic viability, primarily through marine-based tourism, they now see themselves as critical habitats.

Speaking at a rally in Esquimalt today, the coalition members stressed that they are passionate supporters of all killer whale populations.

“No one recognizes the importance of protecting marine habitats and marine life more than the men and women in coastal communities who depend on strong fishing and tourism sectors to earn a living and feed their families,” said Karl Ablack, Vice President of the Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce. “The countless volunteer hours and millions of dollars anglers invest in salmon habitat and hatchery restoration work demonstrate that we are passionate supporters of BC’s Southern Resident Killer Whales and efforts to ensure their survival.”

Based on the DFO report identifying the critical habitat zone extension, local community chambers fear there may be further measures put in place that might curtail marine-based activities. Coalition members say no further actions impacting activity in the new critical habitat zone should be undertaken without more research and greater consultation to ensure any policy changes reflect the latest scientific research and the knowledge of local stakeholders and leading cetacean experts.

“Marine-based tourism and activity is the lifeblood of our communities,” said Ablack. “Recreational fishing alone generates nearly a billion dollars in direct revenue to the BC economy and employs more than 8,400 people. Thousands more jobs are supported by other marine-based tourism sectors, such as accommodations, travel, transportation, suppliers, fuel and others.

“If fin fish closures and restrictions on other marine tourism activities are put in place, we could see those totals reduced by as much as a third, with the vast majority of those job losses, business closures and lost revenue hitting coastal communities. As the federal government now works to define how best to manage the expanded critical habitat zone, our goal is to work closely and collaboratively with the Minister and government to come up with solutions that protect the orcas as well as our coastal communities and fishing and tourism sectors.”

While recently announced measures related to fish hatcheries, slow-down areas for ships, vessel orca monitoring systems, initiatives to reduce pollutants and vessel noise, and the announcement of \$100 million in funding for salmon habitat protection and restoration are seen as positive, it’s feared the extension of the critical habitat zone could pave the way to new restrictive management measures.

Now faced with a critical habitat zone that was based on inconclusive research and limited local stakeholder knowledge and input, coalition members are hoping that, as the federal government considers its next steps, it will take a more measured and science-based approach that incorporates extensive research and scientific best practices; avoidance protocols; generations of local and Indigenous knowledge; and the published findings of leading marine and cetacean experts.

“As British Columbians who are now concerned about the survival of our own businesses and communities, we urge the federal government to slow down the implementation of any additional management measures, take the time to get the science right and engage coastal stakeholders,” said Ablack. “Potential restrictive management measures, such as a fin fish closure, that are based on faulty data and limited science could end up destroying our communities and do nothing to help the orcas. On the other hand, a carefully considered multi-faceted approach that includes deeper investments in restoration, enhancement, science and monitoring could ensure that orcas and coastal communities thrive together as we have for generations.”

## **Quotes**

"Marine-based tourism is one of the pillars of Vancouver Island's visitor economy. Hundreds of thousands of domestic and international tourists visit this region annually for recreational fishing, whale watching, boating, diving, and other marine-based experiences delivered by thousands of tourism professionals. This vital sector is a major contributor to the Island's \$2.3 billion tourism industry."

*Anthony Everett*  
*CEO, Tourism Vancouver Island*

"The expanded critical habitat zone could have an enormous impact on thousands of Vancouver Island tourism operators. While recognizing the goal of protecting southern resident killer whales, we also need to ensure marine-based tourism remains sustainable from an environmental, economic, social, and community perspective. To that end, we look forward to working with government to achieve the collective goals of all stakeholders."

*Walt Judas,  
CEO, Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia*

"Each year, the whale watching industry in BC educates hundreds of thousands of people on a range of topics that includes marine biology, oceanography, earth sciences, global climate change, prey availability, mammal zoology, salmon rehabilitation and all the political factors surrounding societies interactions with the oceans. As an industry that generates approximately \$250 million in economic impact, we look forward to working with government to develop measures that protect marine life as well as marine based tourism."

*Alan McGillivray  
President, Pacific Whale Watch Association  
Owner, Prince of Whales*

We stand with the Chambers to voice our concern that if additional Area Closure measures are put in place, the social and economic harm that will inflict will devastate small coastal communities heavily reliant upon recreational fisheries. We are eager to work with DFO to develop a number of key science-based strategies that will help ensure protection of SRKW, most notable being Avoidance Zones.

*Pat Ahern  
President, West Coast Fishing Guides Association*

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