



# Media Release

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## **Northern Saskatchewan fishers in need of federal aid package**

*Treaty 5, 6, 8 & 10 Territory.* Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) is committed to supporting First Nation families who depend on the Inland Freshwater Commercial Fishing Industry for their livelihood. The COVID-19 virus has brought great uncertainty to many small businesses across Canada, and the inland fishing industry is one of the casualties. Due to the pandemic, support is needed for this year's fishing season.

On April 25, 2020, the federal government made an announcement on providing an \$62.5-million aid package to help the country's fish and seafood processors to protect workers from COVID-19, and to ensure they can continue to keep the seafood market alive. The funding is earmarked for PPE and to help fish and seafood companies adapt their plants to comply with health directives. The funds will also be used by processing companies to cover equipment, such as freezers.

"We are also experiencing how the supply chains that would have taken the fish from boat to market no longer exist in a stable and dependable way, and this aid package should have also included inland fisheries in northern Saskatchewan that have contributed millions to the Saskatchewan economy. There is still a demand for our products but most of the focus have been on food that has a long shelf life, and this has effectively shut down our industry," explained PAGC Grand Chief Brian Hardlotte.

"We are concerned that the federal announcement does not address the distinction between oceanic and inland fishers. We not only need to receive financial support to look after our families, but we also need to restart our industry, so we are asking for similar funding or be identified as an industry eligible for a portion of the aid package," said Hardlotte.

An inland freshwater organization that represents commercial fishers is also seeking extensions to employment insurance benefits as well as funding for capital investments.

John Beatty, Vice President of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Fisheries Limited (SCFL) explained, "With the closure of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation plant and the collapse of the fish market in Saskatchewan, northern fisheries need a year's extension

on their EI benefits. The fishing industry falls under seasonal self-employment, and therefore an extension of twelve months on the fishers' EI is more appropriate than the provision of the CERB, since it would ensure fishers would receive an amount they are accustomed to through EI during the off-season.”

“A capital investment is also required to upgrade their local plants, docks and ice sheds not only to store fish but to provide fresh fish to their communities. This could be done during COVID-19's closure of the fishing industry and preparations can be made now for when fishing resumes, including improvements, such as a local co-op,” he added.

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Chief Bobby Cameron added, “The federal government must provide for our inland fishers in that fishing is not only an inherent right of our peoples, but it is also a fundamental right of Treaty. It has been a source of sustenance for First Nations since time immemorial. Families in the north rely on this industry to feed their families, and they need all the support they can get to make ends meet, especially during this pandemic.”

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**Media enquiries may be directed to:**

Tina Pelletier  
Communications – Executive Office  
Prince Albert Grand Council  
Cell: 306-941-7120  
Email: [tpelletier@pagc.net](mailto:tpelletier@pagc.net)

Larissa Burnouf  
FSIN Communications  
Federation of Indigenous Sovereign Nations  
Cell : 306-291-6864  
[communications@fsin.com](mailto:communications@fsin.com)  
[larissa.burnouf@fsin.com](mailto:larissa.burnouf@fsin.com)

Vice President John Beatty  
Saskatchewan Cooperative Fisheries Limited (SCFL)  
Cell: (306) 960-6025  
Email: [jsbeatty10@gmail.com](mailto:jsbeatty10@gmail.com)