



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Proposed purchase of Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation by a Consortium of Indigenous Communities

Unceded Algonquin Territory (Ottawa) – A report was released today from the Ministerial Panel on the Transformation of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation setting out a three year process to guide the transition of the crown corporation to a modern structure suitable to meet the needs of those with a stake in the fishery. With respect to the panel process, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is concerned that a further 3 years will not serve stakeholders of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) well.

Since 1969, under the *Freshwater Fish Marketing Act*, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) has operated as a centralized marketing body that buys, processes and markets all freshwater fish from participating jurisdictions caught on a commercial licence. In the last ten years, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have all withdrawn from the *Act*, each in favour of an open market — though fishers in each of the those jurisdictions continue to sell to FFMC under contract. The withdrawal of Manitoba from the *Act* in 2017, leaving the Northwest Territories as the sole participating jurisdiction, led to a reconsideration by the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans of the role of the FFMC going forward and the creation of a Ministerial Advisory Panel to evaluate its future.

A broad consortium of Indigenous Communities from across the country are proposing to purchase FFMC from the Government of Canada. The Indigenous Freshwater Fish Marketing LP (IFFMLP) is composed of organizations representing 69 First Nations across the country, including the key communities traditionally reliant upon FFMC's stable operation. These organizations include the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (Manitoba), the Ni'akinde Group (NWT, Saskatchewan, and Ontario), and the K'atl'odeeche First Nation outside of Hay River, NWT.

"The public evaluation of FFMC's future that has occurred over the last two years has served as an opportunity for our communities to get together and consider what role we could play in the future of the management of our freshwater fish resources," said Arlen Dumas, Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

"Providing sustainable stewardship of resources in our traditional territories while empowering our people through economic opportunity is at the core of what we do as community leaders. This ownership structure, developed in deep consultation with our communities and fisheries business leaders, allows us to do both," said Grand Chief Dumas.

More than 75 per cent of the fisherman that supply fish to FFMC are Indigenous and the presence of FFMC has, over its 60 year tenure, assisted Indigenous communities to carry on their traditional livelihoods. But alongside FFMC's stability has persisted a resounding disappointment about low prices and the limited opportunities to thrive within its structure. IFFMLP intends to change this.

"The fish harvested from our waters is pristine. We respectfully disagree that another three years of engagements will result in a beneficial result for our people. The proposed ownership structure that IFFMLP captures ensures the people most invested in freshwater fishing have control over our own resources: our First Nations and our local fishers," said April Martel, Chief of the K'at'l'odeeche First Nation, one of the proposed owners of the venture.

The focus of IFFMLP will be improved quality and fish price outcomes, an emphasis on sustainability and the revitalization of the governance model of FFMC. Its goal is stable, streamlined management that works directly with the communities it purchases from, and it has received letters of support from the Province of Manitoba and the Province of Saskatchewan for its purchase proposal.

IFFMLP is structured as a hybrid for-profit/co-operative entity, proportionately owned and governed by the purchasing consortium of Indigenous communities noted above and regional commercial fishing enterprise (CFEs). These CFEs will bring together fishers living and working in the same geographic area who agree to exclusively sell their fish to IFFMLP. They will oversee the delivery of training, entrepreneurship and mentoring programs for fisher start-ups in their region and distribute profits proportionately to their members. This structure ensures that decisions that affect the resources and economies of communities dependent on inland fisheries are made by members of those communities.

The panel's report identifies that an Economic Development Corporation providing Indigenous ownership, national in scope, with opportunities for Indigenous development and training may be a suitable alternative for stakeholders in capturing the greatest value for fishers.

"With a broadly representative consortium in place, and a federal government that has committed to make a cornerstone of its agenda the robust and sincere commitment to reconciliation with First Nations, the time to transition to IFFMLP is now," said Grand Chief Dumas.

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