

Right Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Office of the Prime Minister  
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November 9, 2015

RE: Pacific Northwest LNG facility proposed for Lelu Island and Flora Banks

Dear Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,

My name is Yahaan and I am the hereditary chief of the Gitwilgyoots, meaning “people of the kelp.” We are members of the Tsimshian Nation, a group of nine allied tribes of Lax Kw’alaams living along the lower Skeena River and on the north coast of British Columbia.

This letter is in pressing regard to your commitments to renew Canada’s relationship with First Nations and protecting northern BC’s irreplaceable marine resources. Unfortunately, under the leadership of former Prime Minister Harper and Premier Clark, a situation was allowed to fester that has now reached emergency proportions.

**The urgent issue is the pending approval of the Pacific Northwest LNG project proposed for Lelu Island**, which is part of our traditional territory in the estuary of the Skeena River. This project could cause irreversible damage to Flora Bank, which is an extensive eelgrass bed next to Lelu Island that is the most critical habitat in the Skeena for juvenile salmon, shellfish and other marine resources. **PNW LNG is poised to cause irreparable damage to the second largest wild salmon run in Canada, and potential catastrophe for the fisheries economy thousands of people depend on.**

Despite research conducted as far back as the 1970’s by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans that clearly showed this location should never be industrially developed, the Prince Rupert Port Authority, a federal agency without provincial or local oversight, advised PETRONAS and their partners to site a massive LNG facility there. **Our community, as well as all other First Nations communities that rely on Skeena salmon, were not consulted in this decision.** The idea that First Nations will only be consulted after major decisions have been made about development that profoundly affects our rights, title, and interests is contrary to your commitment to reframing Canada’s relationship with First Nations, and your commitment to the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights. Lelu Island is not an acceptable location for the PNW LNG project, and our community does not grant permission for it to proceed.

Many of our people earn their living from commercial fishing. The Skeena river supports one of the world’s largest and most intact wild salmon runs. It is the backbone of a

dozen First Nations' cultures, and a central pillar of the northern economy, bringing in excess of \$100 million every year to the region from commercial and sport fishing. As such, these are not just First Nations' issues but ones that affect all British Columbians, especially those who rely upon healthy and abundant fish stocks.

Recent research conducted by the Skeena Fisheries Commission, Simon Fraser University, SedTrend Analysis, and others, has confirmed the importance of the Lelu Island/Flora Bank area. That research showed that 88% of all Skeena salmon, approximately 330 million out-migrating smolts per year, rely on Flora Bank for shelter, food and protection as they adjust from fresh water to salt water. Sedimentology reveals that the proposed jetty pilings, bridge supports, dredging, and LNG tanker traffic could disrupt the balance of complex river and tidal currents that hold the relic sediments of Flora Bank in place, eventually degrading and destroying this critically important habitat by erosion or deposition.

**This is not the first time we have said no to LNG at this site.** In 1977, we rejected Dome Petroleum's plan to build an LNG facility on Lelu Island for the same reasons. Our decision then was echoed by the 1975 North Coast Environmental Assessment Team, which clearly stated this site was unacceptable for any industrial development because of the unacceptable risk to fisheries.

You have demonstrated a sensitivity and understanding of the economic and cultural importance of northern BC fishery resources, especially through your clear opposition to the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway project. The PNW LNG project similarly affects our region. If built, it could have disastrous consequences for coastal communities and Canada's second largest wild salmon watershed.

Our nation has spoken clearly on this issue. In early May, following presentations by Petronas and independent science teams in three different locations, **our community unanimously rejected an unprecedented offer of \$1.15 billion from Petronas to buy our support for their project.** This is the measure of our commitment to defending the wild salmon of the Skeena. If you lose the fish, you lose the people.

Our voices are now being ignored. Soon after our vote, Petronas announced a conditional Final Investment Decision in the project. Failing to buy our consent, they began to act as if our consent was irrelevant. On July 14, the BC Government followed suit and approved the project in the Legislature.

When we heard in late August that the Prince Rupert Port Authority gave permission to PNW LNG to begin test drilling on and around Flora Bank, our people decided to take a stand on the ground. On August 26, myself and a group of our people and supporters moved onto Lelu Island, and have been living there since, turning away surveyors and drillers who have already damaged eelgrass on Flora Bank and removed culturally modified trees from the island. Chiefs from the nine allied tribes, as well as the elected

Lax Kw'alaams Band Council, stand together in continuing to assert that Flora Bank is off-limits to development. The actions of the contractors working for PNW LNG have not received community consent. Tensions are escalating.

**Prime Minister Trudeau, you have an opportunity and a responsibility to address this issue and bring resolution to this escalating conflict.** The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) approval is the final major permit this project needs before it can proceed under Canadian and BC law. This approval is expected any day now from your government. You pledged to Canadians that you would revamp and strengthen the CEAA process, build a new relationship with First Nations, and protect BC marine resources via increasing the extent of both marine protected areas and funding for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. During your campaign, you stated that even though governments grant permits, only communities can grant permission. **If you stand by these commitments, you will not allow the Pacific Northwest LNG project to be approved by CEAA, and you will direct the current geotechnical work on Flora Bank to cease.**

You have an incredible opportunity here to start your term in government by sending a clear message that you are serious about the promises you made on the campaign trail. We ask that you respect the decision of our nation to say no to this project. We ask that you to work with First Nations to find projects that are truly responsible and sustainable, and that do not threaten the very resources and landscapes that define us all. **We call on you to stand with us and the communities along the Skeena River to protect wild salmon for the sake of all future generations.**

Sincerely,

Sm'ooyget Yahaan (Donald Wesley), Lax Kw'alaams, Tsimshian First Nation

Cc: Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
Honourable Hunter Tootoo, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans  
Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice  
Honourable Christy Clark, Premier of British Columbia

**We, the undersigned, stand with Chief Yahaan in rejecting PNW LNG on Lelu Island/Flora Bank:**

- Garry Reece, Mayor (Chief Councillor), Lax Kw'alaams Band Council
- Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs
- Chief Na'Moks (John Ridsdale), Office of the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs
- Chief Liz Logan, Fort Nelson First Nation

- Chief Nathan Parenteau, Saulteau First Nations
- Chief Malii (Glen Williams), President and Chief Negotiator, Gitanyow First Nation
- Robert Chamberlin, Chief Councillor, Kwikwasutinuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation
- Chief Luutkudziwus (Charlie Wright), Gitxsan Nation
- Chief Gwinitixw (Yvonne Lattie), Gitxsan Nation
- Chief Spookw (Norm Stephens), Gitxsan Nation
- Chief Marj McRae, Gitanmaax Band Council
- Chief Bob Barnes, Kispiox Band Council
- Chief Tony Sampare, Glen Vowell Band Council
- Murray Smith, President, Kaien Island Friendship House Elders
- Caleb Behn, Executive Director, Keepers of the Water
- First Nations Wild Salmon Alliance
- Urban Gitxsan Society
- Toghestiy, Likhts'amisyu Stronghold.
- Roy Henry Vickers, C.M., O.B.C., DLitt.
- Dr. David Suzuki, PhD, Co-founder of David Suzuki Foundation
- Dr. Wade Davis, BC Leadership Chair in Cultures and Ecosystems at Risk, UBC
- Dr. Barb Faggetter, Oceanographer, R.P.Bio.
- Dr. Alexandra Morton, Independent Biologist, R.P.Bio
- Naomi Klein, Author and Syndicated Columnist
- Andrew Weaver, MLA Oak Bay-Gordon Head, Deputy Leader BC Green Party
- North West Community College Students Union, Local 66, Canadian Federation of Students - British Columbia
- Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition
- Skeena Wild Conservation Trust
- North West Watch
- Douglas Channel Watch

- Troy Peters, Chair, Northern Branch, Steelhead Society of BC
- Friends of Port Edward
- R.A.V.E.N. Legal Trust (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs)
- Living Oceans Society
- Wild Salmon Caravan
- The Wild Salmon Defenders Alliance
- Oscar's Source for Adventure, Smithers
- Aquabatics Paddle Sports, Smithers
- Bear Claw Lodge, Kispiox River
- Jamie Hahn, Khutzeymateen Wilderness Lodge Ltd.
- Jim Allen, Owner, Kispiox Fishing Company
- Yvon Choinard, Owner/Founder, Patagonia Inc.
- Sea Kayaking Guides Association of BC
- Dave Evans Melissa Moure, Owners, Bulkley Rivers Lodge
- Kispiox Valley Community Center Association
- Wilderness Committee
- Council of Canadians
- West Coast Environmental Law Centre
- Sierra Club BC
- My Sea to Sky
- Canadian Youth Climate Coalition
- Idle No More
- 350.org
- Downstream: Reimagining Water
- Saanich Inlet Network
- Lead Now
- Greenpeace
- Sum of US

- Beyond Boarding
- The Water Wealth Project
- Tanker Free BC
- BC-Yukon KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives)
- Streams of Justice
- Wildlife Defense League
- Institute of the Humanities - Simon Fraser University
- Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG)
- No One Is Illegal Vancouver - unceded Coast Salish territories
- Simon Fraser University Public Interest Research Group (SFUPIRG)
- Kwantlen Public Interest Research Group (KPIRG)
- Defenders of the Land
- No More Silence
- Rising Tide Coast Salish Territories
- Rising Tide Seattle
- Rising Tide Portland
- Rising Tide North America
- Fraser RiverKeeper
- Russian RiverKeeper
- Columbia RiverKeeper
- Living Rivers
- Colorado Riverkeeper
- Spokane Riverkeeper