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**Securing Food, Health and Traditional Values
through the
Sustainable Use of Marine Resources**

“As indigenous peoples rise from the ashes of colonialism and oppression; shed the shackles of despair and dependency; secure our right to live; create a safe environment to live in; revive our identities; restore our languages; assert our right to our customary foods; return to our belief systems; utilize our accumulated ancient wisdom; rebuild our local economies; revitalize our natural resources and restructure our respective traditional governments to be effective in the 21st century. Then, and only then, can we look in the face of genocide with self-determination”

Tom Mexsis Happynook

(Slide 1) At the root of indigenous self-determination are duties, responsibilities, philosophies, jurisdictions and authorities that have evolved over millennia into unwritten indigenous laws.

(Slide 2) These laws reflect and codify our relations to the natural world. They are the products of the slow integration, or co-evolution, of our cultures and governance systems with the environments that sustains us. The most essential of these governance responsibilities are those that integrate people with the environment. These responsibilities maintain our sustainable relationship with nature, the environment and the ecosystems of which our people, with all our indigenous governance institutions and cultural practices, are an integral part. This complex state of relationships has been developed and nurtured over generations and generations. Reflecting on the past, we can see that some indigenous practices were purely of social and/or cultural importance (arranged marriages, etc.). Yet, without doubt, the Nuu chah nulth cultural practice of fishing, hunting and gathering has a much deeper role that helps create the basis of indigenous self-determination by recognizing that cultural diversity and bio-diversity are not separate, but are in fact interdependent and constitute the reality of bio-cultural diversity. In the Nuu-chah-nulth language “Hishuk Tsawalk”, everything is one - everything is connected.

(Slide 3) Furthermore, Nuu chah nulth government systems developed and evolved within the natural limits of nature. These natural limits have cultivated the following principles, which guides Nuu chah nulth today and ensures accountability is maintained. Respect is the foundation of our existence. We firmly believe making decisions that flow from respect assures the natural world (of which we are a part) will be with us in perpetuity for future generations to use and benefit from. Order is found within Nuu chah nulth societies, and tribal governments prescribe strict values, principles, and teachings that makes sure everything is in its correct place and undertaken at the correct time. Protocols ensure the order is adhered to. The spoken word holds authority within Nuu chah nulth society. Witnesses are invited to attend great feasts (potlatches) to bear witness to the business of the tribal governments. These witnesses give the spoken word authenticity and

authorization and it is during these feasts that government business becomes public knowledge. **(Slide 4)** Nuu chah nulth society follows strict unwritten laws regarding ownership. Ownership is dependent upon public knowledge and while Nuu-chah-nulth individuals did not amass great amounts of material goods there is great importance put on ownership. Place names and familial names are used to prove ownership. Responsibility is taught from conception and continues throughout life. We believe this principle creates a strong and healthy sense of belonging and fosters loyalty to the society, the tribal governments and the natural resources that we very much depend on. Accountability is maintained through the implementation and maintenance of traditional values. These values set the parameters for decision making and include, but are not limited to: managing based on Hishuk tsawalk – everything is one – everything is connected; meeting the present needs without compromising the needs of future generations; making sure the human relationships (peoples' roles) are not removed through total protection; taking what you need, putting back what you remove and utilizing all that you take. There are of course others. These values ensure everyone lives up to their responsibilities and can thus be held accountable. **(Slide 5)** A disciplined body, spirit and mind is highly valued in Nuu chah nulth society and we understand the importance of preparation, especially when it comes to resource management and sustainable utilization. Cleansing, bathing, praying and fasting is a very important cultural practice and is carried out when consequential decisions have to be made around hunting, fishing, gathering, the management of natural resources and governance. It is clear the principles of respect, order, protocols, spoken word, ownership, responsibility, accountability, discipline and preparation are inter-connected and support each other creating the foundation for effective governance, resource management within the natural limits of nature and self-determination.

(Slide 6) The Nuu chah nulth belief system has four principal spirit chiefs; on the land spirit chief; in the sky spirit chief; in the water spirit chief and beyond and below the horizon spirit chief. The last spirit chief is considered to be unattainable, unapproachable, unseeable and unknowable. Just as you can, and will, chase the horizon forever. We also believe there is a multiplicity of spirit forms that is found in everything that surrounds us. Respect is given to all natural resources for the many functions they play within Nuu-chah-nulth life and we always position ourselves in relation to nature because everything has a value other than its physical anatomy. For example, when we need to use a cedar tree we not only thank the spirit of the cedar tree but we also explain the many beautiful things that will be made to help us survive socially, culturally, spiritually and economically.

(Slide 7) In the past the Nuu chah nulth hereditary chiefs governed over the natural resources with the help of elder advisors, special advisors, their wives, speakers and experts who were taught from birth to look after the natural resources. There were beach keepers, river keepers, mountain keepers who were expected to walk the beaches, rivers and mountains and apply the knowledge they have attained in their respective areas of responsibility. It is important to note that there is a difference between knowledge and information, which I will explain in this way. When a mother became pregnant the hereditary chiefs kept a close eye on her and her husband to see if they had begun teaching the baby while in the womb. *(Our education process begins at conception and carries on until you leave this world. Every one of our people leaves this world as an elder/ teacher, they are not pushed aside but instead held up in the highest regard for the knowledge, expertise and experience that they have accumulated over their lifetime).* As the child developed the hereditary chiefs would watch to see if the child was applying the teachings they had been given. As they entered adulthood, if they continued to apply the teachings the hereditary chiefs would begin to provide them with knowledge rather than information. This was the beginning of their journey. They were now

being groomed to hold natural resource management knowledge and become a major contributor to the community.

(Slide 8) Animals play an important role for the Nuu chah nulth because they express life in many ways. Wolves are considered to be our professors and pathfinders. **(Slide 9)** Whales are considered to be the keeper's of the record. **(Slide 10)** Eagles express love, honor, peace and friendship - we believe these attributes are needed to truly be free. **(Slide 11)** Otters teach us balance; not to be too serious; to have some fun. **(Slide 12)** Minks express arrogance and self-importance. **(Slide 13)** Bears express solitude, loneliness and strength. **(Slide 14)** The octopus exhibits shyness, timidity but yet has great strength in its own environment. There are of course many other examples.

(Slide 15) It is this practice of observation and reflection that constitutes a "science of relations", -- indigenous science. This indigenous science has developed over millennia providing principles, which reflects an acute awareness of the necessity of including social, cultural, spiritual and economic considerations within our understanding of the ecological world. The natural world is a complex web of such realities, and together, they teach us there is a natural law of nature, which we must live by. We are only one component in this web of life and have a particular place which we must occupy. Everything is inter-connected and when one element in the web of life is over exploited, or removed from the system through total protection, the balance in nature is lost. We are not dominant over nature - which is clearly evident in our ancestor's ancient and unbreakable relationship with their surroundings. People have a role to play, which is to assist in maintaining the balance in nature even as we maintain our place in it and one of the most important tools we have at our disposal to do this is respectful, responsible and sustainable utilization. We must manage the relationship between people and nature, and not seek to manage either people or nature; it is the relationship between these entities which must be managed. Indeed, it is these principles that bind us into the web of life.

(Slide 16) From these basic principles "traditional ecological knowledge" has evolved, providing us with an accumulation of ancient wisdom and understanding of where we fit within nature, the environment and the ecosystems found within our territories. I would even go as far as to suggest that western science has a great deal to learn from traditional knowledge systems, including the intricate understanding of ecosystem dynamics and the understanding which has been formulated over millennia through careful observation. This then begs the question: how do we incorporate traditional ecological knowledge, (ancient wisdom and understanding), with western science? How do we bring western science, which is based on facts and logic, into a marriage with the indigenous "science of relations", which is based on an understanding of the natural world and incorporates social, cultural, spiritual and economic considerations? In my opinion, the social, cultural, spiritual and economic aspects of resource management should become part of the formal education system. If appropriate social, cultural, spiritual and economic studies and programs were developed as part of the science curriculum this would pragmatically reduce the timeframe in which co-management boards could become effective partners or other mechanisms could be created.

(Slide 17) Several years ago I asked a wise old Nuu chah nulth elder: "how do we mesh western society with our traditional society? He closed his eyes and after about fifteen minutes, I thought he had fallen asleep. When he opened his eyes he told me that we couldn't actually mesh the two societies because we come from two completely different sets of values and principles. He explained the two societies need to be brought together so they are parallel; side-by-side; moving forward together, but separate. He went on to say, in order for this to take place people from

both societies need to be identified and trained. It is these people who will link both societies together, transit the space between them, and move both forward at the same time. This may be a conceptual generalization but I believe the fundamental theory can be applied to linking traditional ecological knowledge, western science and modern management techniques.

(Slide 18) Structured systems of indigenous governments include systems of commerce and exchange, different concepts of wealth and very different nutritional habits, which have been developed on the strength of, and in accord with, generations of observing the natural systems which we live in, and ultimately sustain us. When the term subsistence is used it is always viewed in its minimal form - survival. This invokes deeply rooted colonial stereotypes of indigenous peoples as a people perpetually on the edge of starvation, living hand to mouth. But as our ancestors tell us, ours was (and is) a world of abundance and responsibilities. Our principle of respect was not born from a longing for mere sustenance, but instead in gratitude for the cornucopia found within our territories. Indigenous peoples subsist enmeshed in the pattern of relationships with nature, the environment and the ecosystems. This pattern of relationships is not merely to survive, but to thrive; it includes everything; the plants, the fish, the sea-mammals, the land mammals, the mountains, trees, water, and even the winds which change with the seasons. Everything is deemed worthy of our respect, and consideration.

(Slide 19) When we speak of "subsistence whaling", we are not referring to whaling done out of desperation, or a practice which demands the parties involved be dressed in the fashion of their ancestors 500 years ago. Indeed, "subsistence" hardly seems an appropriate word. It is a category imposed on traditional whaling peoples by a section of society whose view of nature has been clouded. With a proper understanding of what we mean when we are discussing subsistence, the values of whaling will be properly understood as it extends into the realm of culture, spirituality and economics. **(Slide 20)** Topics not easily explained to those who insist we must be on the verge of starvation before we are permitted to whale, claiming that we "do not need to whale anymore", as though our fundamental physical, psychological and spiritual needs differ from our ancestors. **(Slide 21)** That we do not need to fulfill our responsibilities within the ecology's of our ancestral territories. **(Slide 22)** Our social, cultural and economic practices are diverse because the environments we live in are diverse. **(Slide 23)** We have evolved in harmony with the natural systems around us, and whaling is no exception; indeed, it is a prime example. For indigenous whaling peoples it is, at its most fundamental level, a very visible expression of the relationship existing between people and the natural world. **(Slide 24)** The ecological relationships that unite hunters and the hunted continue; Orca hunt whales, some whales eat fish; some fish eat krill, some whales eat krill. So what is missing? What has been consciously suppressed by the protest industry? It is the ability of people to once again be a part of the web of life. The environmental issue is finally coming full circle; it is time to once again fulfill our responsibility to the ecosystems which sustain us. This is the root of subsistence and sustainable utilization.

(Slide 25) Whaling, as with all other "subsistence" activities, has always had a commercial aspect. In the Pacific Northwest the Nuu chah nulth traded whale products great distances inland for items not readily available on the coast. This was accomplished through a complex and established network of traditional trading routes. However, it represented more than a trade of goods, it was also a way in which political, social, and familial ties with distant and neighbouring peoples was established, maintained, and strengthened. Commerce provides a central social and cultural dimension to subsistence -- something often forgotten in the western world's insistence that economic activities must exist as a separate category. Indigenous whalers no longer trade blubber for stone tools. Whaling communities, like communities everywhere, require cash to

function in the twenty-first century. Who can say what commerce will look like in another thousand years? The medium of exchange may change, but the principles of respectful, sustainable and ecologically sensitive utilization will not. These fundamental understandings will continue to be passed down and remain integral to the maintenance of bio-cultural diversity.

(Slide 26) When the term “commercial” is used there are voices that cry out from distant urban centres that whaling must stop; that the “slaughter” must end. Meanwhile the protest industry conjures up images of the unforgivable over-exploitation of whales to generate a whirlwind of concern. At the heart of these cries and fabrications exists the misguided impression that there is a global re-emergence of industrial whaling? To a generation schooled in the Western world on the excess of industry, whose daily bread may itself be toxic, and whose fears are exploited by a protest industry bent on using them, commercial whaling is presented as a symptom of “our” presumed slide into ecological devastation. In spite of all the emotions, the truth is very different. What needs to be emphasized and understood is the difference between the “industrial self-regulated whaling” of the past and the sustainable, science based “commercial whaling” of today. The issue is not about some elapsed debate between the profiteering, industrial whaling of the past versus the small-scale commercial whaling of the present. It is not about commercial whaling versus aboriginal subsistence whaling, or any other sort of convenient distinction. It is about sustainable resource extraction versus non-sustainable resource extraction. Whaling peoples stand firmly in support of the former, it is the principle of sustainable utilization which runs to the very heart of our respective life ways.

(Slide 27) The world will not witness a return to the self-regulated industrial whaling of the past. The market for whale products is limited outside of the use of meat and blubber for food and the need for bone and baleen for traditional works of art - it is practically non-existent. Synthetic oils have replaced the need for whale oil to lubricate the machinery of industry, vegetable oils have replaced whale oil in the food industry, perfumes are no longer made from ambergris and corsets no longer need baleen. In economic terms, it can be said that the contemporary world is one in which whale stocks far exceed current and projected market demand for whale products. A return to the industrial scale whaling of the past would certainly be cause for alarm for everyone, in particular the small-scale whalers of today. The lessons of the industrial whaling period will not be forgotten; the world will make sure of that, as will the whalers.

(Slide 28) In a time when the call to live a more ecological lifestyle is all around, the re-emergence of locally specific, respectful, sustainable harvesting should be applauded, rather than protested. Is it better to continue living in a state of dependency on external support, and detachment from our immediate ecology's, or is it better to become more integrated into such natural realities? At one time the environmental movement was searching for a "better" state of living; a new model which awakens environmental consciousness in the people, and integrates the social world with the natural world. Yet here we have people, indigenous and rural peoples, who have lived this way for millennia. Unfortunately, we are opposed in this, ironically by those who do so in the name of this search for a "better" way of living within our environment. Such people actually believe that they have a deeper, more "evolved" and more "holistic" understanding of whales than those who have lived in relationship with them for millennia. They often state "no one who knew whales as I do could conceive of hunting them" as if the dislike of killing, and a sense that whales are worthy of respect were a consequence of their supposed deeper knowledge. However, understanding and respecting the whale's magnificence does not make it "wrong" to subsist on them, to cherish them as the most esteemed of customary foods.

At the very least, we must move the debate from the realm of emotion and protest profiteering, to the realm of logic and ecology. Emotion is powerful, immediate, and a good source of financial support for one's cause. One is able to take immediate advantage of the public and gain financial support in the process. But this is very dangerous. Emotion changes much faster than ecology... people become desensitized to emotional pleas over a relatively short period of time. You can see it happening already. People are getting tired of the protest industry and are indeed frightened by their tactics. Where will this overemphasis on emotion, to the detriment of ecology, leave the public's understanding of nature 20 years from now, when emotional appeals no longer work, and ecology has become a casualty of the overemphasis on emotion. Even as whaling peoples seek to embody the traditional principles that the resources and ecosystems remain healthy for seven generations after we are gone, it is conceivable that the protest industry could exhaust the public's interest in, and understanding of ecology within mere decades. From this perspective whaling represents a key example of the very notion of stewardship, and ecological awareness that many claim is lacking in the industrialized world.

(Slide 29) In conclusion, I believe there are several important elements which need to be addressed if we want to be conservationists in its truest sense. We need to reinstate a belief system, one that dictates that we be respectful when we use the natural resources - many of the world's indigenous peoples already have these belief systems in place, but cannot implement them due to colonial oppression. We need to give serious consideration to integrating traditional ecological knowledge with western science and well-founded current management techniques. We need to create new regional management regimes that will include appropriate indigenous people into the decision making process. We need to apply values and principles of sustainability to resource management, rather than volumes and greed. We need to review the principles and ethics of western science and make changes where appropriate for the proper inclusion of the ethical principles embedded in traditional ecological knowledge which has been derived from an accumulation of ancient wisdom. And, we need to develop social, cultural, spiritual and economic studies and programs that can form part of the formal science curriculum.

Food for thought:

Building a house of resource management cooperation

Foundation

Social, cultural, spiritual and economic considerations

Walls

Principles of sustainability;

Western science;

Traditional ecological knowledge; and

Modern day management techniques

Roof

Overarching principle of Hishuk Tsawalk- Everything is one, Everything is connected.

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