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No Development Plan for Large Scale Commercial Water Bottle Project within *shíshálh*, Homalco and Klahoose First Nation Territories

Sechelt, BC – The Clark Government recently approved sixteen licence applications to extract water from the *shíshálh*, Homalco and Klahoose First Nation Territories. The licences are held by a numbered company, believed to represent the Kwiakah First Nation, for the purpose of establishing a large scale commercial water bottle enterprise. The water bottling scheme involves applications to extract water from 34 streams located in the Jervis, Toba, Bute and Knight Inlets. Each licence has a term of 30 years and is paired with a land lease at the mouth of each stream.

The water extraction licences were approved despite opposition from *shíshálh*, Homalco and Klahoose First Nations, the Sunshine Coast Regional District and no less than six environmental organizations, who have all called upon the Provincial government to authorize an environmental assessment so that the water bottling scheme can be properly vetted. *shíshálh*, Homalco and Klahoose First Nations are particularly concerned that the Province approved the licences without a meaningful process of consultation – a legal requirement that is intended to protect Aboriginal interests and promote reconciliation.

Chief Garry Feschuk, of the *shíshálh* First Nation, confirmed that not much is known about the water bottling scheme: “Since as far back as 2010, we have repeatedly communicated to the Province our concern that we had not been provided with enough information about the water bottling project. It has always been our view that the impact of this project needs to be examined and assessed on an aggregate basis. Taken together, the licences establish a water diversion rate that is many times more than the threshold value, which triggers a requirement to submit a Development Plan under the *Water Act*. We simply do not see how the Province could possibly consider such an operation without the benefit of a Development Plan.”

Klahoose First Nation is equally concerned about the impacts of this water application. “We are adamant that the application process was flawed in the consultation process. How could we let the protection of our natural resources go by the wayside and let others do business without our full consent?”, said Chief James Delorme of the Klahoose Nation. Chief Delorme also added, “The prospects of letting this slide by without our full participation is an insult and disservice to our members. Klahoose joins our *shíshálh* First Nation neighbors in objecting to any further development on this file.”

Chief Richard Harry and Council of the Homalco First Nation join with the *shíshálh* and Klahoose First Nations in opposing the granting of a large number of water extraction licences for areas within their Traditional Territories. Homalco has made its opposition known from the beginning and has appealed the issuance of 18 water extraction licences to the Environmental Appeal Board.

In addition, the water bottling project involves the intention of another First Nation to exploit *shíshálh*, Homalco, and Klahoose First Nation resources without prior consent. In this way, the project violates Article 32 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, which contains principles of consultation, cooperation and consent, which all First Nations must honour. Said Chief Feschuk, “This is not a comfortable situation for us. It is not one that we are familiar with. We have some concerns that the water bottling project is being supported by industry interests who have remained anonymous. We are convinced that a constructive discussion between our peoples, about how to reconcile our interests, is now the best way to move forward. Until that time, however, we intend to take every step necessary to ensure that the water extraction project does not proceed.”