



POLICY BRIEF 2022

Access to Traditional Foods

Clams

Kristen Walkus

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & sə́ilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

And Also Too

COVER ILLUSTRATION

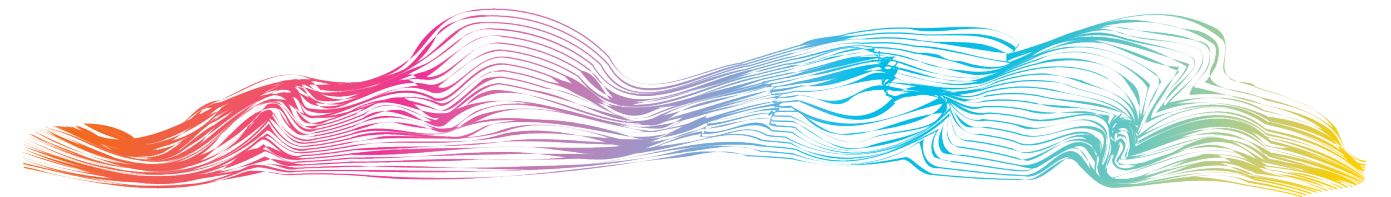
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About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hə́nq 'əmin 'ə́m̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sníchim-speaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

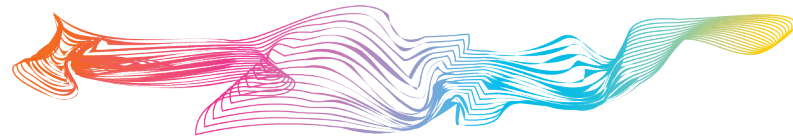
Biography

Kristen Walkus



Gilakasla, nugwa'am Xwamdasbe'. Hello, my name is Kristen Walkus, I am from the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation. I was born and raised in Port Hardy, BC, in Kwakiutl Territory. I currently reside as an uninvited guest on Tla'amin Traditional Territory.

I currently work as my Nation's Lands and Resource Office Administrator. I started as a Fisheries Technician as a way to get out to our territories and reconnect. My career started growing from there. Connecting to my roots was and is integral for me. My passion is to see more of our community have the opportunity to be back on our territories, reconnecting to land and practicing our culture and traditions.



Executive Summary

The Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program (CSSP) is administered by the federal government through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC).

The CSSP manual is a reference document for monitoring, classifying, and controlling areas where bivalve molluscan shellfish (hereafter referred to as shellfish) are harvested. The federal policies and criteria in the manual are stated to “apply to all harvesting of all shellfish unless otherwise specified.”

In order to have a site open for clam harvesting, we as Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, are forced to comply with the CSSP and send out mussel samples to test for contamination. Mussels are used for testing because of their tendency to accumulate toxins more quickly than other bivalve species.

Testing consists of gathering mussels at the beginning of the season, making sure they are accessible for use throughout the season. When we start the testing in Fall/Winter, we start with weekly testing for three weeks, after that, we are able to switch to biweekly samples. To retrieve the samples from our Territories, we either go in by boat which, in the wintertime on an average day takes about 2–2 ½ hours one way to retrieve the samples. Or we pay one of the salvage operators in the territory, and the floatplane operator, to have them shipped to Port Hardy. Once we have the mussel samples in the office, they are generally frozen and sent the next day to the CFIA by Purolator or plane.

The requirement imposed under the CSSP to conduct testing in order to exercise our

inherent rights gets very expensive, very fast. Since we have started, we have spent approximately \$10,000 on testing alone. In this time, we have applied for funding and have been turned down, and taking on this cost to access the clam fishery long-term is not feasible for the Nation.

Article 39 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states: Indigenous peoples have the right to have access to financial and technical assistance from States and through international cooperation, for the enjoyment of the rights contained in this Declaration.

Further, the Sparrow test asks when there is a valid legislative objective to the crown limiting Aboriginal rights, if the infringement has been minimized, and whether fair compensation has been offered.

Clams continue to play a vital role in food security, and passing down traditions and culture and, while the CSSP is intended to ensure human safety in the consumption of shellfish, Canada is not recognizing its obligations to protect Aboriginal rights, and our priority right to access and harvest shellfish for food, social, and ceremonial (FSC) purposes by implementing bureaucratic barriers in the name of conservation, that are neither minimally impairing or accommodating.

Background

Since time immemorial the Gwa'sala people lived in and around Smith Inlet and surrounding Islands. The Nakwaxda'xw people lived in Seymour Inlet, Deserters Group, Blunden Harbour, and surrounding Islands. During this time, the staple diet was primarily seafood such as: Salmon, Herring, Clams, Abalone, bottom fish, seaweed, etc. Our people are a seasonal people. We moved to different village sites in the Winter and Summer, depending on where the food was available. Clams are one of the few foods available in the winter time. Every family had their own harvesting/fishing sites. There were different management systems in place to keep the marine species populations thriving. The connection our Nations have to clams can be seen whenever you go to a village site. You will find shell midden at most, if not all of them.

In 1964, we were amalgamated and forcibly relocated to Tsulquate, on the northern tip of Vancouver Island in Kwakiutl Territory. After the relocation, accessing familiar harvesting sites became difficult and DFO took over management of the fisheries in our territories. Since then, fisheries stocks have declined dramatically in our territories, and clams are one of the few sustainable food sources we currently have.

As a direct result of the relocation and due to the barriers in place for testing, the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation has had significant difficulty in being able to harvest clams in our territory in the more recent years. The Nation began to explore the possibility of harvesting clams in our territory again in 2019, and started the process of mussel sampling under the direction/guidance of the CSSP.

Climate change has been, and will continue to be, a major factor in being able to harvest safely and sustainably. With this in mind, one of our goals is to reestablish clam gardens in our territory. In doing this, it would provide food security for current and future Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw community members and help revive cultural practices. With adequate funding and support, GNN would begin the process of reestablishing our clam gardens, maintain a long-term monitoring/testing program instead of a year-to-year basis, and provide a safe and secure food source for years to come. The Clam Garden Network States: "Clam gardens today are 150–300% more productive than beaches without gardens."

UNDRIP Article 29 #1 states: Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for Indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

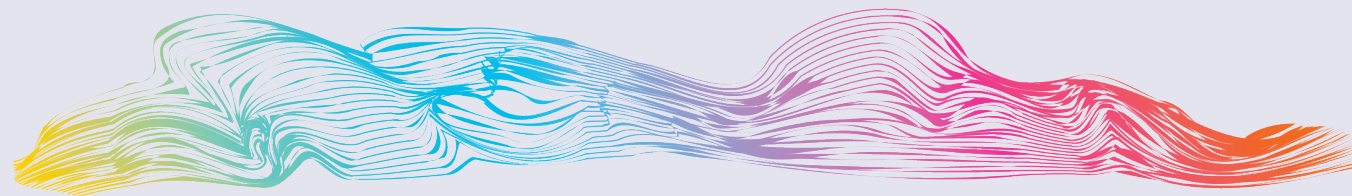


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Policy Recommendations

- 1 Allocate funding to First Nations Communities designated specifically for the testing of bivalve shellfish.**
- 2 The government needs to live up to its commitment to prioritize Indigenous access to FSC harvest after conservation by prioritizing testing and funding of FSC clam fishery locations the same way commercial fishery locations are.**

Conclusion



In conclusion, while ensuring bivalves are safe for consumption, it is also imperative to ensure that regulations don't restrict First Nations from harvesting completely. Communities should be supported in keeping areas open to FSC harvesting in their territories and by creating this policy, it relieves the financial burden communities take on to be able to harvest traditional foods.

While ensuring bivalves are safe for consumption, it is also imperative to ensure that regulations don't restrict First Nations from harvesting completely.

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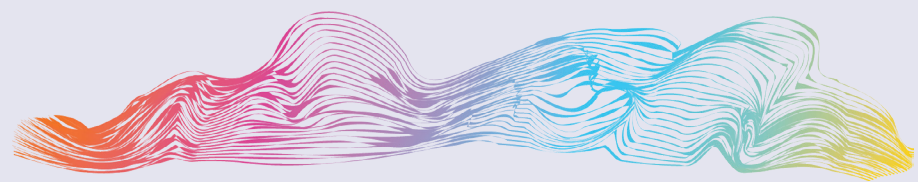
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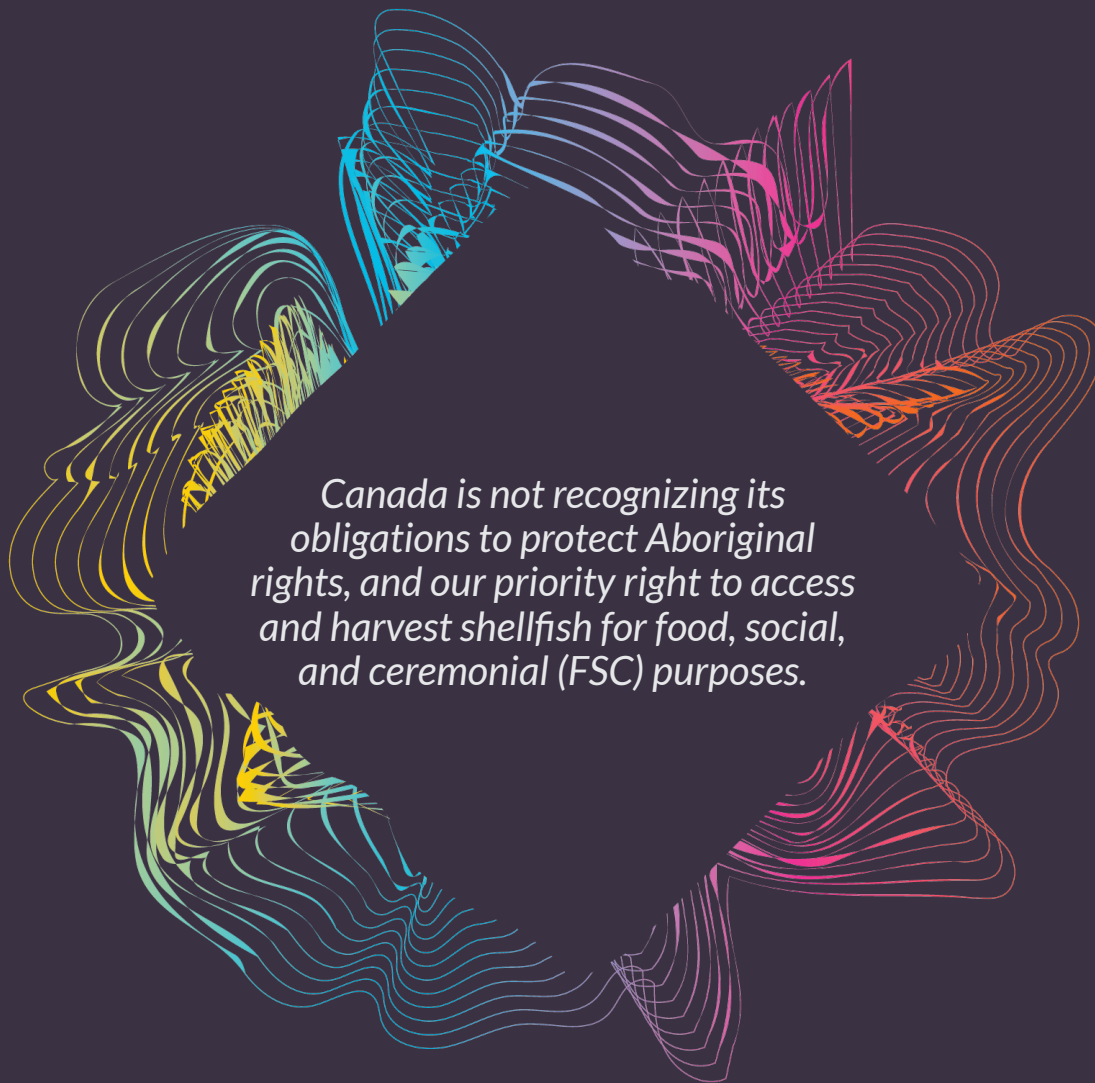
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I am truly grateful for everything I've learned and experienced this year, and will carry it with me always.





Canada is not recognizing its obligations to protect Aboriginal rights, and our priority right to access and harvest shellfish for food, social, and ceremonial (FSC) purposes.

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

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