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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PCFM and AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas jointly call for an independent technical review of the existing Lake Winnipeg fisheries assessment program and management systems

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Pioneer Commercial Fishers of Manitoba (PCFM) in collaboration with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) has today released a final report on the status of Lake Winnipeg fish populations from the Anishinabek/Ontario Fisheries Resource Centre (A/OFRC). This report is superior in methodology and data than that provided through the Lake Winnipeg fisheries assessment program and management systems administered through the province of Manitoba. The AMC is interested in the findings of this report as 90% of the commercial fish harvesters on Lake Winnipeg are from its member First Nations. The research was a result of PCFM members' frustration and confusion in relation to recent unilateral changes to Manitoba's commercial fishing industry without meaningful consultation, transparency, or fact-based research.

The report clearly establishes there are some similarities, but also some drastic differences, between the analyses conducted by the independent A/OFRC research team and those that have been published by the Province of Manitoba. It is clear that the pickerel population is well established with a less than 1% chance that the lake has been previously overfished in 2019. The independent A/OFRC research also used state-of-the-art methods to better assess the status of fish populations, especially when drastic regulatory changes are being considered. To that end, the A/OFRC team is now in the process of evaluating the effects of recent changes by the Province of Manitoba in the mesh size of gill nets.

PCFM and the AMC are pleased that the current status of Lake Winnipeg pickerel and whitefish is sufficient to get a pass on the stock status criterion of an eco-certification process. Eco-certification is an international standard and a joint goal of the Province of Manitoba, First Nations and the PCFM as it will ensure Manitoba's industry is safe and sustainable for generations to come. To further the cause of eco-certification, the PCFM and AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas jointly call for an independent technical review of the existing Lake Winnipeg fisheries assessment program and management systems in order to bring these critical systems up to the standard required for eco-certification.

"We are hopeful this new evidence-based research will allow for some much-needed dialogue with the Province of Manitoba to establish benchmarks and testing that are representative of the fishery and ecosystem of Lake Winnipeg. Making dramatic changes without monitoring and analysis of cause and effect leaves the industry and the lake vulnerable. Our priority is the sustainability of the lake and stocks as we are generational fishers and hope to continue our traditions well into the future," said Einar Sveinson, President of PCFM.

Earlier in 2019 the PCFM commissioned economists at MNP to complete an independent review of the commercial fishers' annual impact to the economy. The result was that the commercial fishing industry is directly responsible for just under \$90 million annually to the Manitoba economy with over triple that as an indirect benefit. The commercial fishery has been contributing to Manitoba for decades and all stakeholders hope that unilateral changes and lack of consultation stops so that all can work together to ensure the fishery benefits all Manitobans for years to come.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said, "I was pleased to previously meet with Minister Pederson in relation to First Nations' concerns about the changes to the industry as they have direct impacts to many of our Nations that rely on commercial fishing for their livelihoods. The Minister agreed that no further quota buybacks would occur until more discussion and proper review of impact was completed. This established that the Province of Manitoba was willing to work together to ensure the future of the industry. After reviewing the report, I think it is clear there is more work to be done, and First Nations are eager to get back to the table with the Province to work toward a solution that protects the lake and the fishery."

In the coming weeks the PCFM and the Grand Chief are very optimistic that further discussions with the Province of Manitoba, as well as the other stakeholders, will be fruitful as there is now a third party that has provided independent research which has highlighted some areas of concerns. In the meantime, the PCFM and Grand Chief Dumas call on the other fishery and sport-fishing stakeholder groups to support their request for an independent technical review of the current assessment and management system on Lake Winnipeg.

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For information concerning and related specifically to the final report, please contact:

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About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Ininew (Cree), Anishinew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.