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Two Months After Grounding, Qalipu First Nation Presses for Increased Action to Prevent Environmental Disaster

Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador – Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation, representing more than 26,000 Indigenous People on the island of Newfoundland, is urgently calling for immediate and decisive action to address the ongoing environmental threat posed by the *MSC Baltic III*, which has remained grounded in Lark Harbour since February 15, 2025.

The stranded vessel is carrying an estimated 1,600 metric tons of heavy fuel oil and marine gas and continues to present a serious and growing risk to the waters of Elmastukwek (Bay of Islands), to the region's fisheries, and the traditional lands and livelihood of Qalipu First Nation and surrounding communities. The situation has recently become more urgent with the discovery of tar balls starting to wash ashore; evidence that the heavy fuel has started to leak.

Qalipu First Nation has been actively engaged since the grounding through its Department of Environment and Natural Resources and maintains close communication with the Canadian Coast Guard. Qalipu First Nation Chief, Jenny Brake, recently visited the wreck site and met directly with local fishers and the Coast Guard personnel who were all very helpful. Chief Brake has since received correspondence from a Canadian representative of the shipowner, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), requesting a meeting with their Communications Director.

“Despite repeated assurances from authorities over the past two months, cleanup efforts are not making meaningful progress,” explained Chief Brake. “It is alarming that containment booms have yet to be deployed and there appears to be reluctance to build a road for safe access to the vessel. With each passing day, the risk of a catastrophic spill increases—threatening our environment, economy, culture, and our way of life. Decision makers who can approve and prioritize fuel and wreck removal are required to address the situation now.”

“As stewards of these waters for generations, Qalipu First Nation brings deep place-based knowledge of these lands and waters and offers expertise that is essential to any safe and effective response,” said Chief Brake. “We understand the currents, marine life, and seasonal changes that others may overlook. It is important to integrate our knowledge into planning and decision making—not just as stakeholders, but as full partners in

safeguarding this territory. We are committed to working collaboratively with all levels of government and relevant agencies to ensure this issue is addressed swiftly and responsibly.”

Qalipu First Nation is calling on the Government of Canada to:

- Demand immediate and transparent action from MSC’s senior leadership to mitigate the environmental threat.
- Enforce greater accountability for foreign shippers operating in Canadian waters.
- Strengthen oversight and emergency preparedness for marine traffic and industrial incidents.
- Integrate Indigenous knowledge, leadership, and decision-making into response planning.

“The ocean is central to our identity, our traditions, and our survival,” added Chief Brake. “Hundreds of families in this area depend on it for food, for work, and for the well-being of future generations. A spill in this area would be far more than an environmental disaster—it would be a cultural and economic tragedy.”

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