

# BC Treaty Commission

Presentation by

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*Check Against Delivery*

# Treaty Making is Good For You

Thank you for inviting me.

It's challenging to be the last speaker at a three-day conference, which has as its title Coastal Community Health: A Social Crisis.

However, I hope that what I have to say will build on your work over the past three days and will provide some encouragement for you to keep up the good work.

The title of my talk is Treaty Making Is Good For You.

Now, immediately, a song comes to mind. Maybe you know it. "The more we get together the happier we'll be..."

..."cause your friends are my friends and my friends are your friends."

The great thing about that song is that it's true.

I'm stealing here from a presentation by noted Canadian economist John Helliwell, who studied wellbeing in a survey of 45,000 Canadians.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the study found wellbeing improves when people work together collectively to improve their lives. When I'm thinking about your wellbeing and you're thinking about mine, we both feel better and we do better.

If you want to find out more about his study you can go to our web site or talk to our Communications Manager Brian Mitchell.

Good health is terribly important and is dependent on many factors. I want to talk about some of those factors.

Essentially, I've boiled my talk down to two central points.

**Treaty making will benefit coastal communities, and**

## **Treaty making is good for your health.**

My first point is not just about economics. Although it is true that treaties provide more land and resources to First Nations, cash and a measure of self-government, there are many other benefits, too.

These are the intangibles, the pride and self respect that comes from taking control of your own lives and your future, making your own decisions on a daily basis without looking over your shoulder.

Community pride has a lot to do with how people feel and I want to talk more about that later.

It's also true that economic and other benefits will flow to First Nation neighbours.

Treaties unleash investment, support local resource development and other types of development, create jobs and transfer wealth and decision-making to local communities.

The Treaty Commission has studied the economic benefits of treaties and here's what we found:

- First Nations will receive upwards of \$7 billion. (We're not slicing up the pie into smaller pieces; it's a bigger pie.)
- Total benefits, including increased investment, could be as high as \$50 billion, and perhaps much more.
- A study in the early 90's concluded BC was losing \$1 billion a year in lost investment due to the lack of treaties.
- Our own survey of businesses confirmed these findings in 2004.

All of these things are contributing factors in health outcomes.

Unemployment is poison.

Community pride is contagious.

But it's the local decision-making that I want to underline because it's a major source of pride.

And returning land and resources to community use is a major source of pride.

This is equally true in aboriginal communities and in non-aboriginal communities.

I have a good example from a story that was in the Treaty Commission's December newsletter.

It's a story about Yale First Nation, the Fraser Valley Regional District and the Town of Hope working together to secure a Community Forest Licence.

Doug Hansen, speaking for Yale First Nation said, "With this Community Forest Licence we can meet broader community objectives, have a more meaningful role in forest management and have more benefits."

The partners are now working on setting up a community forest development corporation and a plan for the timber allocation.

In this case, it's a story about forestry, but it could equally apply to health care or eco-tourism, or cottage industries.

Substitute health for forestry in Doug's statement and you would have something like this:

"With this coordinated community approach to health care, we can meet broader community objectives, have a more meaningful role in health care management and have more benefits."

Or substitute ecotourism.

"With this coordinated community approach to ecotourism, we can meet

broader community objectives, have a more meaningful role in land use management and planning, and have more benefits.”

Now, I want to turn to the second point – **treaties are good for your health.**

I will use a study of the 200 Indian Act band communities in BC to illustrate my point.

And the rate of suicide in these communities as an indicator of the health of a community.

I’m aided here by a report from two BC university professors, Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde who studied youth suicide in those 200 communities.

They found that youth suicide is not an aboriginal problem, but a problem confined to only select aboriginal communities.

In fact, 90 per cent of suicides occurred in less than 10 per cent of the aboriginal communities.

That’s right – 90% of suicides in 10% of communities.

Dramatic differences in the number of youth suicides can help to distinguish one community from the next.

So, what are those differences?

In their studies over the first 6 years, the authors came up with 6 factors, which can be summarized as “cultural continuity”.

In communities where all 6 things were in place, there were no suicides.

Where none of these 6 things were in place, the suicide rate was 10 times the national average.

We can learn something from this list.

And it’s an interesting list:

You might be interested to know that suicide rates are largely unrelated to measures of poverty and isolation, but are strongly related to measures of “cultural continuity”.

That was a very important finding. The authors were so surprised by their findings they continued the study for several more years.

The list for the first 6 years of the study was:

- Evidence the First Nation had taken steps to secure aboriginal title to their traditional lands;
- Evidence the First Nation had taken back from government agencies certain rights of self government;
- Evidence the First Nation had secured some degree of control over educational services, police and fire protection services, and health delivery services; and
- Evidence the First Nation had established in their community certain officially recognized cultural facilities to help preserve and enrich their cultural lives.

Two, were added for the subsequent 5 years of the study:

- Evidence of the participation of women in local governance; and
- Evidence of child and family services within the community.

Women’s involvement is particularly important given that historically First Nations of the west coast are matrilineal societies.

The authors report that, “Those communities that have achieved a measure of self government, that were quick off the mark to litigate for aboriginal title to traditional lands, that promote women in positions of leadership, that have supported the construction of facilities for the preservation of culture and that

have worked to gain control over their own civic lives, for example, control over health, education, policing and child welfare, have no youth suicides.”

Chandler and Lalonde conclude the information is helpful in determining where we should be putting our effort.

So, if we connect those two dots we can see that treaties benefit coastal communities in more ways than just economic – it’s not just about money – and treaties are good for your health.

My other job is sustainable cities. (EXPLAIN)

Here’s what we’ve learned so far. (This is in a report to the federal government, which will be released soon.)

A sustainable community has to have:

- A prosperous economy;
- A healthy environment;  
—The two are not mutually exclusive—
- Action to address social issues; and
- A sense of place and attention to culture and tradition

So, we can look at these sustainability values and conclude that treaties can help to support a prosperous economy, and a healthy environment, address social issues and reinforce a sense of place.

And now I hope I’ve connected all of the dots.

There are two questions I want you to consider when you are working in your communities to improve the lives of your citizens:

What makes a good neighbour?

What makes a region strong?

I think the answer is obvious. We all want:

- Sustainable communities with a degree of local control;
- Socially and economically healthy communities; and
- A co-operative spirit with an eye on new economic opportunities.

When we talk about treaty making, let's explore together what that new relationship should be ... in our communities and in our regions.

That's where I have been putting some of my focus.

I like what John Slater, the mayor of Osoyoos has to say about neighbours.

He said, "Being able to work, live, laugh and play in harmony with our neighbours makes peaceful resolution to the challenges that arise from time to time so much easier to accomplish."

That, to me, sounds like the kind of relationships we should be striving for and treaties are a catalyst for change to a new relationship, one that we can be proud of as British Columbians and as Canadians.

I'm hopeful that treaty making will make a difference in your coastal communities. I'm sure they will.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.