



November 26, 2008

For immediate release

## News Release

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### SAYS TREATY COMMISSION IN 15<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL REPORT

# Opportunities for treaties ‘encouraging’

VICTORIA, BC – The Treaty Commission, in its annual report, sees at least four good opportunities to move treaty negotiations forward and see more treaties achieved.

Incremental treaty agreements, such as the one signed by the BC government and Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation and the one proposed for Haisla Nation, offer new opportunities and are a tool strongly supported by the Treaty Commission. In these agreements, early benefits of the treaty package are implemented by BC and the First Nation in advance of the full agreements.

Acting Chief Commissioner Jody Wilson said, “The Treaty Commission is monitoring this approach closely and will explore ways in which incremental treaty agreements can benefit more First Nations if that is their choice.”

Opportunities identified at the common table represent a promising basis for reaching agreements with a significant number of First Nations in the BC treaty process, said Wilson. The Treaty Commission will hold the parties to their commitment to respond to its common table report and will work with the parties on specific follow up steps to ensure the work of the common table is acted on and translated into concrete results. Out of frustration and in an effort to resolve their outstanding treaty issues, more than 60 First Nations had worked together at a common table with the governments of Canada and BC over 13 meeting days earlier this year.

Encouraging are recent comments by Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister Mike de Jong that suggest the BC government will attempt to re-engage with the federal government to see if they can turn the ideas from the common table talks into something tangible they can take to individual tables, said Wilson.

There are opportunities for more agreements if the federal government can conclude fish deals as was done with Tsawwassen First Nation and Maa-nulth First Nations. The lack of a federal mandate on fish is hindering treaty negotiations. The delay in any new fish allocations in either final agreements or agreements in principle is the result of a major review of the west coast salmon fishery by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. First Nations have been told the Government of Canada is not prepared to complete final agreements without a fish mandate and no timetable has been given on when a mandate might be achieved.

The federal government must set a timetable for obtaining a mandate and find a solution that recognizes and protects the historic and continuing aboriginal right to fish.

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Outside the treaty process, but encouraging to the Treaty Commission, is the effort being made by the BC First Nations Leadership Council and the provincial government to develop a workable 'recognition and reconciliation act' to address aboriginal rights and title.

"This act, which would be the first in Canada, could go a long way to establishing a legislative framework for reconciliation," said Wilson. "It could help resolve many of the conflicts we are seeing on the ground in First Nations' territories and would complement the treaty making process."

A treaty is not the one, all encompassing answer to every problem and challenge facing First Nations; nor can negotiations occur in isolation from other important initiatives and events that impact aboriginal people, the annual report states. "Treaties should be capable of standing alongside other important initiatives and tools without conflicting with or detracting from them."

In the short term, the Treaty Commission has identified the potential for four final agreements and eight agreements in principle, but cautions that none is a certainty. Meanwhile, more than 30 tables are either in a holding pattern, stalled, pursuing other activities or inactive.

A sustained and determined focus is required by the parties if these opportunities are to be realized as a way forward for treaty negotiations, said Wilson.

### **About the BC Treaty Commission**

The Treaty Commission is the independent body responsible for overseeing treaty negotiations among the governments of Canada, BC and First Nations in BC. It has three roles: facilitation, funding, and public information and education.

Established in 1992, the Treaty Commission and six-stage treaty process are designed to advance treaty negotiations. The Treaty Commission comprises a provincial appointee, a federal appointee, two First Nations Summit appointees and a chief commissioner chosen by agreement of all three parties. For more information about the BC Treaty Commission, please visit [bctreaty.net](http://bctreaty.net).

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