



## BC TREATY COMMISSION

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# Treaty Commission releases 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Report

VICTORIA – Prompt passage of treaties will boost momentum in treaty making and public confidence in the treaty process, says the Treaty Commission in releasing its annual report.

“Things are really starting to happen in treaty negotiations,” says Chief Commissioner Steven Point. “It has taken great effort and goodwill and many resources to get us this far. Ratifying these treaties must be a priority in our provincial legislature and federal parliament once First Nations conclude ratification.”

Chief negotiators for the Lheidli T’enneh and for the Tsawwassen First Nation have concluded final treaty negotiations and are seeking approval of the agreements from their Principals. Point says the ministers’ signatures on those treaties will be an important sign the governments of Canada and BC are prepared to support the passage of these treaties into law.

Passage also requires a concerted effort by both governments to ensure their members are informed and that the public continues to have the opportunity to be well informed, he says.

While ratification is underway, the Treaty Commission is urging the BC and federal governments to seize opportunities for more agreements. “We believe there is an appetite among First Nations for settlement,” says Point. “However, the two governments must recognize that each First Nation has specific needs that must be considered in the negotiations.”

The Treaty Commission notes several First Nations in the treaty process feel sidelined because there is a concentration of resources and effort on those First Nations close to signing treaties. As well, those First Nations close to achieving agreements in principle want to join the group of First Nations concluding treaties.

The BC government has been reluctant to put additional resources into more treaty tables until it is sure treaties are achievable. The Treaty Commission says that must change. “There are additional opportunities to reach agreements and to build more momentum in treaty making, and these opportunities should be fully explored.”

In saying this, the Commission acknowledges there are treaty tables where the parties have been unable to find enough common ground to make progress. There are 57 First Nations in the treaty process in 47 sets of negotiations. These First Nations represent the majority of Indian Act bands (120) and approximately two-thirds of the aboriginal people in the province.

As First Nations move closer to agreements, there is an urgency to resolve territorial overlaps. A Treaty Commission priority is assisting First Nations to address these issues in the year ahead.

The Nisga'a Nation has given us reason to consider the day after treaties and to question whether First Nations are ready. A Treaty Commission priority is seeing that planning for implementation gets the attention and resources required to guide and support the First Nations' transition to new government structures.

The diverse views of six First Nations on treaty making, including the Nisga'a Nation, are the centrepiece of the 2006 annual report.

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