



BC TREATY COMMISSION

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Treaty Commission releases 12th Annual Report

VICTORIA – Important court rulings and political actions are likely to have a positive impact on future progress although they have at times overshadowed treaty negotiations this year and temporarily slowed progress, says the Treaty Commission in its 12th annual report.

“The success of treaty negotiations is dependent upon the political will and commitment of the parties,” said Chief Commissioner Steven Point. “Recent actions of government and First Nation leaders suggest conditions have never been better. Political will and commitment are at their highest which can only mean that we are on the threshold of concluding long-awaited treaties in British Columbia.”

Of significance is the BC government’s commitment to a new relationship with First Nations, a pledge backed by a \$100 million fund and a renewed commitment to treaties and other interim arrangements. Talks are underway with three First Nation political organizations following an historic leadership accord between the First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations

As well, the federal government has concluded a Canada-wide review of policies and processes affecting aboriginal people, including aboriginal and treaty rights, and will host a First Minister’s meeting with aboriginal leaders later this fall.

This political will, and the necessary commitment that springs from it, should create better conditions for negotiations. First Nations leaders and the governments of BC and Canada are already having some success in exploring issues through high-level talks.

The Treaty Commission believes the prospects for agreements in the years ahead should be much better. The preparedness, generally, of the parties to enter into treaties is improving and the issues are better understood. Under these conditions, there are First Nations that are moving forward relatively quickly now towards treaty agreements.

Consequently, we expect some major breakthroughs. Several First Nations remain fixed on concluding agreements in the months ahead. One or more First Nations may finally achieve the new relationship they have been seeking since entering the treaty process 12 years ago.

Debate will continue in the short term over the best course of action for a First Nation. Some will wait and see what happens in treaty negotiations as the parties in advanced negotiations pursue

solutions to self-government, tax, financial and fish issues which have proven especially difficult. Other First Nations will continue to assert their title and make interim arrangements where possible, and court actions are likely to continue.

But as our progress report reveals, most First Nations in the treaty process remain focused on negotiating a comprehensive treaty that addresses self-government and land, sea and resource issues.

We haven't got all of the pieces, yet. In the meantime, Treaty Commission will focus on facilitation so that we can achieve fair and honourable agreements, and on public information so that people will understand the agreements being negotiated.

As we move forward, the Treaty Commission will remain mindful of its duty to hold the parties accountable for their words and actions and to ensure the parties honour their fundamental commitments to treaty making.

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