

Speaking Notes

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Pre-budget Consultations
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The BC Treaty Commission was established in 1992 by agreement of the governments of Canada and British Columbia and the First Nations Summit to act as the independent body responsible for facilitating treaty negotiations. Unlike in the rest of Canada – treaties remain unfinished business in BC, resulting in a continuous cloud of uncertainty over the land and economy.

This is the first time the B.C. Treaty Commission has appeared before this Committee. We do so, to emphasize to the Government of Canada the direct economic benefits of completing treaties.

And we are here because we think there is not a clear understanding, by all parties, of the economic importance of doing treaties and in particular the opportunity for a B.C. economic stimulus package.

Resolving these treaty issues will result in economic benefits where it is most needed. Rural British Columbia has suffered the economic downturn worse than other parts of the Province with the devastation of the forest industry. A perfect example is the West Coast of BC, where the recent treaty with the Maa-Nulth First Nations and Canada's support for the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation's negotiations has created an opportunity to drive the recovery of the economies in the area and turn it into a tourist mecca.

We are here to ask for the Committee's support to accelerate the work going on in government to get these treaties completed. And to build upon the impetus created by the recent passing of the Maa-Nulth First Nations Final Agreement in record time, in four days, with all Party support, by the House of Commons and Senate

Our message fits with the Prime Minister's *Economic Action Plan*:

"The Prime Minister's commitment to promote greater participation by Aboriginal men and women in the Canadian economy and to address the specific challenges and opportunities they face are well-reflected in the *Economic Action Plan*." (Implementing Canada's *Economic Action Plan: Impacts for Aboriginal People and Communities*, Update, Fall 2009, Government of Canada).

The Auditor General of Canada, in her Report to the House Commons in 2006, noted "In our view, a fair and timely resolution of land claims through negotiated treaties will lead to sustainable land and resource development in the province."

The BC Treaty Commission's most recent report on the economic impact of treaties will soon be released and it will confirm that the benefits are substantial. The valuations in the report are based on the three treaties that Canada has recently completed in British Columbia, two of which have been ratified.

If, for example, we were able to complete two treaties rather than one each year for the next 15 years, the net benefit doubles to \$2 billion and wage income doubles to more than \$7 billion.

Post-treaty, First Nations become self-supporting through their own taxes and earnings and will rely less on federal transfers. By settling treaties sooner, the federal government saves the costs incurred through prolonged treaty negotiations.

In addition there are the lost opportunity costs of not doing treaties identified in an earlier study as \$1.5 billion annually.

Settling treaties now would result in greater benefits being delivered sooner to First Nations and British Columbians and creates a multiplier effect in the economy.

We ask the Standing Committee on Finance, to consider in your report to Parliament, the importance of achieving the economic stimulus effects that will result from completing treaties in British Columbia.