

Fraser Valley Treaty Advisory Committee First Nations Media Monitor - Excerpts August 7, 2009

*Summary of news events reported on First Nations, Aboriginal communities, and rights & title issues.
This report can also be found on the FVTAC website at the following link:*

<http://www.fvrd.com/AboutUs/FVTAC/Pages/Reports.aspx>

AROUND THE PROVINCE

Rethink on Reconciliation Act

Following widespread resistance by B.C. First Nations, George Abbott, B.C.'s Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister, said that the provincial government is rethinking whether or not to continue pursuing the proposed Recognition and Reconciliation Act. The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, which was one of the groups involved in the development of the proposed act's discussion paper, recently announced it would no longer support the legislation due to too many unanswered questions within its framework. However, Premier Gordon Campbell says he will continue to work toward reconciliation and the "New Relationship" even though some of the "players at the table have changed."

(Globe and Mail, July 23; Prince Rupert Daily News, July 28)

ACROSS THE NATION

National Chief Promotes Unity

Newly elected Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo's first visit in his official capacity was as the guest of honour at a powwow on the Carry the Kettle First Nation near Regina, Saskatchewan. Atleo told those in attendance that it is time for Aboriginal unity and for communities across the country to "support one another, treaty and non-treaty."

(Nanaimo Daily News, July 28)

TREATIES

First Nations Reps Talk Treaty Issues with Ministers

On August 10, representatives from over 70 B.C. First Nations will meet with Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and George Abbott, B.C.'s Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, at a one-day conference in Vancouver to discuss stalled treaty negotiations. The goal of the conference is to find common ground to resolve the current deadlocked issues such as the constitutional status of treaty lands, governance, and co-management of traditional territories. Robert Morales, chief negotiator for the more than 60 First Nations of the Common Table negotiations, said he was encouraged by the fact that the ministers agreed to meet face-to-face following a request from First Nations in April. "It would appear they are taking us seriously," said Morales.

(Nanaimo Daily News, July 15)

Maa-nulth Chiefs Seek Treaty Implementation Date

The chiefs of the five Maa-nulth Nations of Ucluelet, Huu-ay-aht, Toquaht, Uchucklesaht and Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Chek'tles7et'h' met with Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister George Abbott over concerns that federal money for treaty implementation has yet to be released by Ottawa. Ucluelet Chief Vi Mundy said they were told by the federal government that all three parties, the Maa-nulth and the federal and provincial governments, must have an agreed-upon effective date for implementation first and that B.C. has not yet fixed a date. Abbott agreed to get an effective date set possibly by the fall of 2010.

(Alberni Valley Times, July 28)

FORESTS

Forest Fires Highlight First Nations Concern

Last fall, the BC First Nations Forestry Council (BCFNFC) submitted a direct request to the federal government for \$60-million in funding over a three-year period to help 103 First Nations fire-proof their communities. The majority of the First Nations communities within the danger zone are in remote areas that are not easily reached by firefighters. Leonard Thomas, president of BCFNFC, said the group is now using the recent fires in Kelowna to highlight the importance of their demand for funding. Although it was believed that B.C.'s First Nations would have access to 20 per cent of the federal fund of \$1-billion initially promised to help combat the beetle epidemic that has turned much of the area into a "tinder box" of dead and dying trees, the money did not flow through to the province as hoped. Since 2005, only \$12.2-million has been allocated by the federal and provincial governments to address the fire threat caused by the mountain pine beetle crises, says the Forestry Council. However, B.C.'s minister of Forests and Range Pat Bell said the province has allocated \$35-million through the Union of B.C. Municipalities and that 85 of the First Nations communities in the zone have applied for the wildfire protection planning funds.

(Kamloops Daily News, July 27)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

First Nations Work on Trail Linking Valleys

The Tseshaht First Nation, City of Port Alberni, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, and Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) have partnered on a project to extend the Canadian National Pacific Railway trail. The Runners Trail project, named for the Aboriginal runners who carried messages between the Ditidaht and Tseshaht villages, will link the Cowichan and Alberni valleys. The Tseshaht, who will manage the project, are permitting a portion of the trail to run through their traditional territory and plan to erect interpretive signs explaining the historic and cultural significance of the area. The project is expected to cost \$929,000 and ICET provided \$450,000 in funding for the western half of the trail and the city contributed a grant from a fund aimed at creating jobs. The Ditidaht First Nation has applied for funding to build the eastern half of the trail, which will run from Frances Lake to Kissinger Lake.

(Alberni Valley Times, July 17; Times Colonist, July 26)

Pacheedaht Partners in Fire Station Construction

Through a partnership between the Pacheedaht First Nation and the Capital Regional District (CRD), the rural community of Port Renfrew will soon have a new fire station. The province is providing the project with \$400,000 from its Towns for Tomorrow funding to go towards the construction and the purchase of a fire pump truck and equipment and CRD will administer service provisions. The design of the new fire station will reflect a First Nations and West Coast theme with cedar logs donated and prepared by the Pacheedaht. The project budget is approximately \$1.32-million and construction is expected to be completed by spring 2010.

(Sooke News Mirror, July 22)

EDITORIAL EDITS

St'at'imc Runner, July 2009 – Editorial, in part:

“Six weeks after the B.C. Liberals stalled the Recognition and Reconciliation Act, needing time to talk people down in the face of an election, the five year term of the St'at'imc – B.C. Government to Government Protocol Table expired.

Grand Chief Saul Terry to the St'at'imc Chiefs Council, June 9 in Xaxl'ip: ‘The Government to Government Protocol Table is technically passé.’

Chief Terry noted, ‘There were 18 items on the list of issues named in the Protocol Agreement. Only one was ever addressed.

Since engaging with the St'at'imc Chiefs on basic protocols, which are ‘not consultations,’ according to the original Agreement, the province now goes about business as usual.

Apparently the results of consultation are irrelevant to B.C., as long as it has actually asked the question. Then it is up to the nation to go to court.

The limbo created by the inactive Protocol Table has affected the development referrals that come flooding into the Lillooet Tribal Council and the bands. Proponents act as if the standard letter response confirming the need for consultation is a direct invitation to continue their plans.

Given that the province is trying to pass legislation around the scope of benefits sharing, consultation and accommodation, other nations and especially the First Nations Leadership Council should pay attention to the level of ‘good faith’ shown in the Protocol Table that disintegrated when St'at'imc Chiefs wanted something more than the province’s bottom line position.

The point is, the province’s bottom line position has been discovered, and it is not satisfactory.”

The Now, July 14 – Keith Baldrey wrote, in part:

“What was an apparent bombshell dropped out of the blue just a few months ago, now seems destined for a long slog of talk and consultation before it has any chance of becoming reality.

I’m talking about the proposed Recognition and Reconciliation Act proposed in March by Premier Gordon Campbell and several top First Nations leaders.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, told me it was now ‘virtually impossible to make any predictions’ about when a bill might actually be ready.

He also revealed the original discussion paper that led to the initial controversial reactions to the proposed Recognition Act – co-sponsored by First Nations and the premier – was now largely a complete no-go, that it had been ‘effectively dispensed with’ by First Nations leaders.

And both Phillip and Grand Chief Doug Kelly of the First Nations Summit disclosed that the real pushback to the Recognition Act is actually coming from First Nations members themselves.

One of the concerns some First Nations members have is the proposal to reconstitute the 203 individual native bands into 30 or so indigenous groups.

Phillip, Kelly and other leaders hope to have a new discussion paper ready to be made public by the end of summer, and then begin another marathon round of consultations with local communities, business and government. It will be interesting to see how ‘dramatically different’ their proposals turn out to be when they are unveiled, and how much they differ from what Premier Campbell originally signed on for.”

Williams Lake Tribune, July 30 – Dean Fulton wrote, in part:

“Does anybody else wonder why the provincial government bothered to talk in secret with the council of B.C. Indian Chiefs to conceptualize and draft the proposed reconciliation act?

Did the native leaders sitting at those meetings never say anything like, ‘We won’t sign this thing unless we get to write it?’

Our Aboriginal people had everything taken from them many years ago, and no right thinking person could disagree. Meaningful reparations need to be made, but at the end of it, we all need to be equal under the law.

Native self-government needs to resemble every other municipal government – nothing more, nothing less.

Most Canadians would welcome them with open arms. The fact is, that is definitely not what they want.

So let’s cut to the chase and all say what we really think. The native leaders have said they won’t risk signing a document that recognizes both Aboriginal title and Crown title.

By shelving the government’s proposal, which, by the way, some B.C. chiefs were initially endorsing, they have shown no regard or respect for the average Canadian and their rights.

They have shown they will not negotiate in any better faith than the government.

Nobody will say it out loud, but everyone knows exactly how that would turn out – a very vast majority of Canadians would vote against giving special considerations to other Canadians, based on the random chance of their birth.”