

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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Newly Introduced Environmental Assessment Bill Goes Beyond the Status Quo and Marks Important Step in First Nation - BC Relations

Coast Salish Traditional Territory/Vancouver: The First Nations Leadership Council recognizes the significant improvements made by *Bill 51 Environmental Assessment Act*, which was introduced today, and begins to make space for proper relations between Indigenous laws and legal orders and those of the Crown.

Importantly, the legislation supports Indigenous Nations carrying out their own environmental assessment processes and supports implementation of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The First Nations Leadership Council points out that the Act does not go far enough in meaningfully implementing the minimum standards affirmed within the *UN Declaration*, as the Act still allows for projects to proceed if consent is withheld by Indigenous Nations. Key amendments are needed so that the Act is in full alignment with the *UN Declaration*.

“This new provincial law is one of several laws that needed to be changed. It is a part of reconciliation that First Nations leaders have been seeking,” stated BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “Premier Horgan has taken bold steps in working with us to create better certainty for First Nations governments, industry and the public. We will continue to ensure that this new environmental assessment law and regulations are supportive of First Nations jurisdictions and decision-making.”

“We commend the provincial government for taking the necessary steps to revise BC’s outdated environmental assessment process with new legislation which recognizes First Nations inherent jurisdiction and sets out a structured process to ensure compliance with Indigenous engagement standards”, said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “The legislation introduced today is a clear signal that BC is moving ahead with commitments to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It represents an important step, and if properly implemented, will lead to fewer legal conflicts and better developed projects by fully including First Nations at all stages of development.”



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Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated, “This legislation recognizes the inherent jurisdiction of First Nations over our lands, territories, and resources, which is a long-overdue first step by BC. Our jurisdiction has, and will, always mean asserting our sovereignty on our lands and waters. We look forward to this Act ushering in a new era of where our inherent Title and Rights as self-determining Indigenous peoples will be respected, including decisions made through our own First Nations’ processes based on our Indigenous laws. We will continue to advance free, prior, and informed consent as articulated in the UN Declaration, which the Province has committed to fully implement.”

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

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