

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

February 1, 2024

Proposed *Land Act* Amendments are Next Step in Implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*

(xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is concerned about recent reactions to the Province of B.C.'s proposed *Land Act* amendments that are inaccurate and unhelpful, and implicitly rely on outdated, mistaken, and regressive views relating to the rights of First Nations.

In 2019, the provincial legislature unanimously passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (Declaration Act) which affirms the application of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) to the laws of British Columbia and contributes to its implementation. Among other things, the UN Declaration recognizes that First Nations have the inherent right to self-determination and to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights. In furtherance of that recognition, the Declaration Act provides the opportunity for the Province to negotiate joint and consent-based decision-making agreements in relation to matters affecting First Nations with First Nations governments.

The proposed *Land Act* amendments are a critical next step for the Province in fulfilling its commitments under the Declaration Act and to align its decision-making processes with the UN Declaration and FNLC supports the Province's work in this regard. The amendments will allow the Province to negotiate decision-making agreements with First Nations under the *Land Act* in the future. Any agreements that are negotiated will be subject to the public engagement processes mandated under the Declaration Act.

Contrary to comments that have been made about the proposed *Land Act* amendments, they will not grant a "veto" to First Nations governments, and they will not immediately alter the existing land tenure system in British Columbia. Rather, they will make space for the recognition and implementation of First Nations' unceded governance rights in relation to land and resource development in their territories – through negotiation and agreement with the Province in accordance with the Declaration Act – rights which have been largely ignored by colonial governments for the last century and a half.

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

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