



Draft Speaking Notes
Hon. Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Virtual First Nations Summit – Zoom videoconference
Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021, 1:00 – 2:00 pm

TO BE CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY

Introduction

- Good afternoon. Territory Acknowledgement. Grateful to be invited to speak.
- Acknowledge First Nations Summit executive; Chiefs, matriarchs and Elders; B.C. Treaty Commission commissioners; Assistant Deputy Ministers Jessica Wood and Trish Balcaen
- Honoured to be here – first opportunity to meet with you all
- Great honour to be appointed Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
- Acknowledge previous minister Scott Fraser
- Returning to the Ministry after many years away – remarkable changes
- Bring valuable perspective – all sides of the treaty table - worked for First Nations, government.
- This diversity of experience will help our work to advance reconciliation
- None of that experience, however, prepared me for being a minister during a global pandemic.

COVID

- Second wave of COVID-19 has hit hard – particularly in First Nations communities
- Everybody is worried about their families, health, livelihoods
- Must do everything we can to protect Elders, the knowledge keepers
 - Vaccine roll-out prioritizing Elders and remote and vulnerable communities
 - Heard this week almost 16,000 First Nations members in 90 communities have been vaccinated
- Acknowledge strong response from First Nations leadership – manage ever-changing situation, keep members safe.
- Committed to do whatever we can to navigate this crisis safely together
- In fact, that is the first item in my mandate letter: Work with Cabinet colleagues to support needs of Indigenous communities through the pandemic
- I know we have had some challenges so far. I also understand there has been an unprecedented level of co-ordination and co-operation between government and Nations as we have managed through this emergency together over the past year.
- This is a concrete example of how we have really started to make progress to shift our government-to-government relationships.
- With vaccines now being administered, some light at the end of the tunnel
- Until we are through this, must keep working together to keep the second wave under control, to get everyone through this safely

- While still managing the response, important discussions on economic recovery after COVID have also started
- Government committed that First Nations have a strong voice in B.C.'s economic recovery planning.
- Example of one important project: expansion of Connecting B.C. Program – \$90 million grant
 - Supporting expansion of broad-band to 200 rural and Indigenous communities
- Another important project: joint with our treaty partner, Huu-ay-aht First Nation – safety upgrades on remote Vancouver Island road
 - Road provides critical medical, emergency and community access to Anacla and Bamfield
 - Innovative arrangement where Huu-ay-aht is managing project for both governments – a great advantage of our treaty relationship
 - Construction will generate jobs for local people, and support growth and diversification in regional economy
- As we continue to plan and roll-out recovery efforts, First Nations participation will be vital
- That is one of the huge differences I see now, after coming back to the government side of the table after 30 years. Government and Nations have developed deep relationships that show we can work together to resolve difficult issues. Enormously encouraging.
- It's very evident to me that we can make meaningful progress, government-to-government, from the place of respect and recognition of rights we have reached.

Mandate and Treaties

- In 2017, all ministers got mandates to implement the UN Declaration and TRC Calls to Action
- In new term, all minister again given responsibility to advance reconciliation
- Acknowledge different ministries are at different stages and capacities for pursuing this work
- In every ministry, this work is guided by the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act
- My specific mandate includes establishing a secretariat to coordinate this work, and delivering an Action Plan in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples
- Will speak more about those in a few minutes
- Also tasked by Premier with working with Cabinet colleagues on a number of items:
 - As mentioned, supporting needs of First Nations in responding to COVID
 - Seeking federal funding to create more on and off-reserve housing
 - Partnering with First Nations on shared decision-making for land and resource allocation
 - Adding more Indigenous languages in B.C.'s school curriculum
 - Reflecting Indigenous peoples' culture and history in provincial parks
- All of this work guided by Declaration Act
- Important to our conversation today, mandate is also clear about improving relationships with all First Nations. Moving away from one-off, transactional arrangements.
- Instead, focusing on reaching innovative, long-term agreements together. Agreements that advance reconciliation, self-determination and economic independence.
- This is, of course, the very nature of treaty. Highest form of reconciliation agreement – constitutionally protected
- Also respect that some Nations seek other paths, other arrangements – that is self-determination
- Want to bring renewed vigour to treaty-making in B.C.
- Some great strides over the last few years – setting strong foundation for this work going forward
- Have seen some fundamental changes:
 - Recognition and Reconciliation of Rights Policy –signed by Canada, B.C. and the First Nation Summit in 2019
 - acknowledge Canada for moving from loans to grants to support treaty negotiations

- These changes give rise to new approaches that we are taking together, focusing on creating a renewed relationship based on rights recognition, self-determination, and co-development approaches. Rooting out the last vestiges of extinguishment.
- Our approach came up from work at individual tables, in response to government's commitment to the UN Declaration.
- The goal is to negotiate treaties based on the explicit recognition of aboriginal rights.
- Creating a living relationship that evolves over time – and eliminating any remaining notion of extinguishment.
- We've moved away from all-or-nothing propositions
- New approaches are resulting in innovation at a number of tables
- Of course, with active negotiations, there are some great examples I can't share with you yet.
- But one that I can is our work with NStQ – the Northern Secwepemc te Qelmučw
- Last year, the Province bought a ranch, and all the equipment to operate it.
- We are leasing it back to the Nation for a nominal amount until we conclude treaty negotiations.
- Overlap between proposed treaty settlement lands and grazing tenures for dozens of cattle ranches has been a significant challenge in the negotiations.
- The purchase helps advance treaty negotiations and strengthen our government-to-government relationship.
- It also puts tools for economic development into the hands of the Soda Creek community right away...
- Helping to grow the local economy, which will benefit communities and people.
- The purchase adds to the proposed treaty land package, offering early access to strategic lands, including water rights associated with the ranch.
- We have of course also been able to move to Stage Five in the treaty process with a number of Nations in the past couple of years.
 - These include agreements with: Ktunaxa, S.X.T.A., Metlakatla, K'omoks, Wei Wai Kum and We Wai Kai, and, Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group,
- We have a couple of others very close to signing.
- These new approaches to treaty-making did not happen because a Minister suddenly had great ideas.
- The ideas came from the tables – from some of you here today.
- We are looking to keep making innovations in treaty-making in B.C.
- This kind of innovation comes from all parties – and we welcome your ideas.
- I also want to say that we recognize there are some long-standing obstacles we face in treaty negotiations.
- They are not new – I know you are well-aware of them too.
- A number of them are on the list for follow-up work in the Recognition and Reconciliation of Rights Policy, including:
 - Lands-related issues, including third-party interests on the land
 - Fiscal relationships, including revenue sharing
 - Overlapping territories
 - Approaches to achieving free, prior and informed consent consistent with the UN Declaration.
- I spoke with the Summit Task Group last week.
- We agreed to building a concrete plan to address these and other issues that we have identified together.

- I also committed to a Principals meeting this spring.
- I want to acknowledge another challenge as well, which we are grappling with internally.
- We know our resources in the ministry are spread very thin. Global pandemic adds to the challenges. But I am working with our team to find solutions
- As we move forward with treaty negotiations together, I invite all of you here – perhaps even challenge you – to keep being creative at our tables together...
- To bring out new ideas.
- Ideas that encourage us all to seek new ways of thinking.
- To keep building on the promising foundation that we've created together – government-to-government – in the past few years.
- I know you are impatient for progress. I can tell you that I am too.
- Especially progress at the community level, that improves the lives of Nation members, and the lives of all British Columbians.
- Want to pause and recognize incredible work so many are doing in extraordinary circumstances
- Many communities facing outbreaks – taxing resources
- Negotiations can be complex and challenging when sitting at the same table...
- Never mind on a screen, hundreds or thousands of kilometers apart. All while worrying about the threat of this terrible virus
- As the Premier said recently, COVID has turned all our lives upside down.
- We have all had to learn new ways to cope, and to keep moving forward to get things done.
- But we are in this together.
- We will keep working through the challenges together.

Declaration Act

- Want to turn now to our work to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.
- It's passage just over a year ago was a historic moment
- It gave us great responsibility to carry out what can only be described as generational work
- Work to start undoing 175 years and more of colonialism
- The bill was historic milestone – but it was only the start. Now, we are into the real work
- Mandate – highest priority to deliver a collaboratively developed action plan
- Working in partnership with Indigenous peoples to develop the action plan
- Some say we are not going fast enough – others that we are going too fast for them to properly engage
- Bottom line: real, meaningful collaboration takes time
- The Act requires us to develop the plan in “consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples” – that is what we are doing.
- Taking the time to get it right – to meet that strong commitment to consultation and cooperation
- The work of engaging deeply with First Nations and Indigenous peoples underway for some months now
- Acknowledge the global pandemic – all facing pressures from that
- Taking the time to do it right
- We are engaging with the Summit, the BCAFN, UBCIC, the Alliance of Modern Treaty Nations, and Nations directly in this work.
- Put meat on the bones
- Aiming to have a consultation draft this spring – get feedback from Nations and other Indigenous partners

- Also working on proposal for secretariat to help coordinate reconciliation work across government – including alignment of laws. Still in early conversations, look forward to sharing more as plans come together
- This work on the action plan and secretariat is important – but government has not been waiting on that to keep making progress on reconciliation. Collaborating together with First Nations in many ways:
 - the COVID-19 response
 - gaming revenue sharing
 - a new justice strategy
 - reforming the Police Act, and
 - conversations about shared decision-making
- There are also a number of new reconciliation agreements with Nations underway...
- And our new approaches to treaty-making that are showing progress.
- Reconciliation is about working together, government-to-government, in respectful partnerships that recognize the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples.
- We are committed to doing that:
 - As we rebuild the province’s economy after this pandemic
 - As we negotiate treaties and agreements that bring lasting change
 - And as we align our provincial laws with the human rights everyone must have.
- I know this is a big task, but I am eager to move it forward – with new energy and commitment.
- There will be challenges. We may not always agree. But together we will find new ways to meet these challenges – and new ways to reach agreement.
- And I look forward to being able to celebrate our successes together along the way.
- I know we are now heading into a Q&A session. Before we get to your questions – I have a question for you. I want a chance to hear from you.
- In the past few years, since we started getting more creative with approaches to treaty negotiations, I want to hear about what’s changed, What’s working to help us make progress? What are the things we can all learn from – do more of – to be successful together? What are you seeing that’s different now, that is helping us to move forward?
- I’d like to hear some of your thoughts, and then I will take some questions.

<Q&A Session>

Closing

- Thank you for opportunity for dialogue today
- Have shared important questions and perspectives
- I am really honoured to be able to help carry this important work forward with all of you.

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