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FORESTRYCOUNCIL.CA

September 15, 2021

Honourable Murray Rankin
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Email: IRR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

RE: Draft Action Plan – Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

We are writing to provide input into the draft action plan (attached) developed by the Province that outlines actions the government will take over the next five years to achieve the objectives of the *United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the UN Declaration). The actions listed in the draft action plan regarding rights of Nations to own, use, develop and control forest lands and resources within their territories are vague, and not measurable milestones. As such, they will not achieve the objectives of the Declaration Act.

We are disappointed and frustrated by the fact that although forestry is identified as a priority area of work under the Joint Agenda: Implementing the Commitment Document, none of the priority areas for action under forestry outlined in the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) submission (attached) were incorporated into the five-year draft action plan. Simply citing the need to reform forest policy in consultation with First Nations does not reflect a commitment to the concrete actions outlined in the BC & First Nations Forest Strategy that should be used to guide and inform forest policy and legislation reform over the next five years.

In 2019 a revised BC & First Nations Forest Strategy (“the Forest Strategy”) was developed collaboratively with the the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (MFLNRORD) and First Nations to support reconciliation and the implementation of the UN Declaration.

The Forest Strategy outlines a framework, with goals and concrete actions for the government to advance the implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (the Declaration Act). The Forest Strategy and its implementation plan were created to provide concrete steps towards advancing reconciliation in alignment with the UN Declaration by making changes to forest policy, legislation, and practices to support joint decision-making, increased forest revenue sharing, and collaborative approaches to forest governance and stewardship.

The Forest Strategy was informed by direct input of BC First Nations for over a decade, and was endorsed in 2019 by the First Nations Leadership Council and BC First Nations through resolutions passed by the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations fully support the BC & First Nations Forest Strategy. Although the FNLC sent several letters in 2019 and 2020 calling on the Province to fully endorse and implement the Forest Strategy, this has not happened.

The provincial government has an opportunity to honour and reflect priority areas of forest policy reform identified by BC First Nations by incorporating the six goals of the Forest Strategy into the Action Plan.

Priority areas of work that should be listed under the 2021-2026 Actions include:

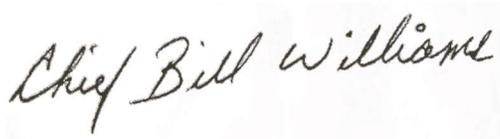
- Development of new forest revenue sharing models to increase revenue sharing to 50% over the next three years,
- Tenure reform and reallocation to increase First Nations access to volume and decision-making regarding forest management,
- Reform of the Timber Supply Review process, and
- Access to resources for all First Nations to develop their own land use plans (LUP), and support their meaningful participation in collaborative LUP processes with the Province.

The Forestry Council seeks to work with Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) and MFLNRORD over the next five years on engagement with First Nations to advance actions that recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and increase the role of First Nations in the governance and stewardship of forest lands and resources. However, to do this work we require consistent and predictable funding.

We look forward to working collaboratively with the Province on the development of a workplan and the implementation of actions that will truly shift the status quo, and ensure that First Nations benefit socially, culturally and economically from the use of forest lands and resources in their territories.

Sincerely,

FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY COUNCIL



Chief Bill Williams, President

cc: Honourable John Horgan, Premier
Chief Judy Wilson, Union of BC Indian Chiefs
BC Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations
Robert Phillips, First Nations Summit

Attachments: First Nations Leadership Council: Summary of Advice from First Nations Organizations for Implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Draft Action Plan – Draft for Consultation