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Land Value of BC Treaties May Exceed \$113.9 Billion

Ottawa--Total aboriginal treaty settlements in B.C. could cost taxpayers more than \$113.9 billion, with the value of land package alone for the Tsawwassen settlement setting the bar for future settlement costs.

This according to Delta-Richmond East Member of Parliament John Cummins who last week released an analysis of the cost of the 434 hectares of new land granted to the members of the Tsawwassen Band in the first urban treaty settlement. His estimates based on available market intelligence pegged the cost of the Tsawwassen land package at \$254 million.

Cummins extrapolated the per capita value of the Tsawwassen settlement and applied it to the population of natives on the 200 other aboriginal bands eligible to come to the treaty table in B.C. to arrive at the total province-wide cost.

The M.P. pointed out that B.C. Minister of Aboriginal Relations Michael DeJong failed to refute Cummins' estimate of the Tsawwassen Treaty land package, instead arguing in a recent letter to the editor that the long-term benefits the Treaty will outweigh the benefits.

"I would rather leave it to taxpayers to make that cost-benefit analysis. That's one of the reasons I studied the costs and arrived at an estimate for the land package. I doubt Minister DeJong has actually calculated the cost of the Tsawwassen land package," Cummins said.

He pointed out that none of the parties involved in the negotiation of the Tsawwassen Treaty can agree on the value of the land that taxpayers are giving to the Tsawwassen Band members.

"Even when responding to my estimates of value, the Chief Federal Negotiator quoted one number and the Chief of the Tsawwassen Band quoted a number more than two and a half times greater than the federal estimate. Finally, the provincial Minister avoids mentioning any number at all and argues the benefits of an open cheque book. This is hardly responsible management of our common public assets."

Cummins said he will be analyzing other clauses of the Treaty document with a view to interpreting for taxpayers the cost of the entire settlement package.

"With numbers as staggering as \$113.9 billion province-wide, we need to be asking whether or not we can afford it."

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