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Letters to Editor

Vancouver Sun
1-200 Granville Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6C 3N3

Dear Editor:

Re: "Trust Tsawwassen Nation" by Miro Cernetig, October 22 2007

Mr. Cernetig's commentary on the Tsawwassen Treaty, "Trust Tsawwassen Nation to develop its own backyard," overlooks key facts.

The commentary suggests it's foolish to think that Chief Baird "has a secret agenda to pave over farmland to make way for endless warehouses and parking lots for convoys of semi-trailers, rolling in 24/7 to load up with containers disgorged by freighters anchoring at a giant port that will eat up the waterfront."

"That's not my vision that's not our people's vision," Ms. Baird is quoted as saying. "Yes we'll develop our lands. But don't forget we live here too."

Ms. Baird failed to reveal that she lives comfortably at the other end of the reserve far away from the encroaching port development. Other band members are not so lucky.

In November 2004 Ms. Baird signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Vancouver Port Authority and a letter to the B.C. Ministry of the Environment in anticipation of the environmental assessment on the container-port expansion. In her letter to the Ministry's Environment Stewardship Division she requested "that there be no Wildlife Management Area imposed" on the waterfront near the environmentally sensitive area now undergoing development for the container-port expansion without her consent.

As part of the deal Ms. Baird agreed not to stall the environmental assessment hearings by raising aboriginal rights issues and committed to the port-related industrialization of farmland. In return the Vancouver Port Authority agreed to fund development of a band-owned "container handling facility" on nearby ALR protected farmland.

Ms. Baird's Memorandum of Understanding with the Port Authority commits her to "work jointly to ensure that the TFN Settlement Lands that are required for the project are expeditiously transferred to the TFN and removed from the application of the Agricultural Land Reserve designation." The agreement states that the land for the

container handling facility will be leased at rates “based on comparable market equivalent rates *for industrial land*.”

Without the agreement of Ms. Baird the massive container-port development would not have begun. As it is presently configured the port development is dependent on the use of the ALR protected farmland being transferred to Ms. Baird.

Furthermore of the 358 band members Mr. Cernitig argue “won’t agree to a community plan that would turn their 724 hectares into an *industrial park*” less than one half, only 163 members live on the reserve. The rest are spread throughout B.C., Canada and the U.S. The majority have abandoned the reserve leaving those who remain to cope as best they can with the encircling port and rail corridor developments. It was those band members who reside off the reserve who were most supportive of Ms. Baird’s treaty and its related port and rail corridor developments.

Furthermore for Ms. Baird to refer to the treaty as a \$122 million treaty is simply inaccurate. When the required farmlands are removed from the Agricultural Land Reserve their value alone will exceed \$254 million.

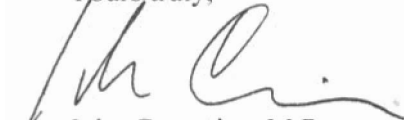
Ms. Baird advises that the band will be required to show how its land development plan fits into the broader regional plans for Metro Vancouver but fails to advise that the treaty requires that the band’s land use plan “will be deemed to meet” the requirements for consistency with the Greater Vancouver regional growth strategy or that the band may well get to keep any GST generated by some of the commercial establishments that might locate on the farmlands. No mention is made of the effect of the loss of farmlands as forage areas for migratory birds of the Pacific flyway or the effect on the future viability of the farms that struggle to remain outside the grasp of Ms. Baird at Brunswick Point.

The Tsawwassen Treaty will be a model for the dozens of treaties to follow. It is high time there was a clear public airing of the real cost of these treaties, not only the up-front monetary costs but the real long-term costs and impacts on how we govern ourselves.

The *Sun*’s commentary on the Treaty relied solely on comments from Ms. Baird denying any intention to industrialize the farmland yet misses the actual port agreement signed by Ms. Baird that would pave the way the development of container handling facilities on the ALR protected farmland and much of the content of the treaty itself.

As Vancouver’s largest newspaper, the *Vancouver Sun* owes a responsibility to its reader’s to accurately report the effect of the Treaty on all reserve residents as well as on the whole of what the treaty calls Tsawwassen Territory, which in reality is most of the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

Yours truly,



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