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2006 Native Treaty unfair to Canadians

Re: Natives Seek 106 Years' Worth of Fishing Line, Dec. 12.

This story, reporting that Alberta natives are suing to enforce a 106-year-old treaty that promised to give them twine to make fishing nets, is a reminder that treaty commitments must be kept not just today and tomorrow, but until the end of time.

Treaty 8, an 1899 treaty, was a simple affair that offered natives livestock and equipment needed for farming. Those who wished to continue hunting and fishing were provided with shot for hunting and twine to make fishing nets.

The 2006 Tsawwassen Treaty, by contrast, covers 212 pages together with 366 more pages of appendices. The real substance, involving taxation, fisheries and other matters, is not always to be found in those 578 pages, but is in the many side agreements provided for in the treaty, which have not been published.

What we do know is that the 2006 treaty provides not merely the opportunity to fish, but also a guaranteed quantity of fish that takes priority over every other Canadian. Some of the best farmland in the country is to be removed from B.C.'s Agriculture Land Reserve so it can be used for a port expansion, at great expense to residents of the Delta and of the Tsawwassen Reserve.

Like the 1899 Alberta treaty, the Tsawwassen Treaty will be part of the supreme law of the land for all time, but unlike the 1899 treaty, it will govern the sorts of laws the Parliament of Canada can enact in the future with regard to fisheries and many other matters.

And the Tsawwassen Treaty can never be cancelled. The special privileges given the Tsawwassen Band will exist forever, as will the responsibilities of the government to enforce its special privileges. Jim

Prentice, the Minister of Indian Affairs, was wrong to sign this treaty, without first allowing Canadian citizens the opportunity to learn what he was committing them to.

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