



John Cummins, M.P.
Delta-Richmond East
www.johncummins.ca

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Tsawwassen Treaty a Step Backward

Ottawa—“The Tsawwassen Final Agreement to be initialled today is not good for the people of Delta, the Lower Mainland, British Columbia or for all Canadians,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-Richmond East).

It makes a mockery of good land-use planning processes in a burgeoning urban region where there has been consensus for a long time around preserving agricultural land and at the very least, involving and consulting the community when deliberations take place around removing land from the Agricultural Land Reserve.

This treaty would remove a huge tract of the most valuable agricultural land in the province without any discussion about its implications on regional growth management, the environment, wildlife or long-term food security in the region. Further, under this treaty the farmers whose land was expropriated at Brunswick Point in the 1960's for the development of the Roberts Bank coal port will not receive full, unencumbered ownership of the land when it is returned to them.

This treaty sets a totally unrealistic expectation when it comes to the cost of urban treaty settlements with Delta's most valuable resource, its fertile farmland, being used as the currency. The value of this treaty is currently estimated at \$120 million or more than \$440,000 to each and every member of the 270 members of the Tsawwassen Band. It circumvents a full and frank discussion of the implications that flow from such a precedent. The people of B.C. and all citizens of Canada have to be aware that this treaty could lead to the total cost of claims settlements in B.C. topping \$40 billion. Where will the land come from to generate this value and if it is not land, then where will the cash come from?

Finally, this treaty and the one signed in Prince George a few weeks ago makes second-class citizens out of any Canadian who is not authorized to fish by one of the 90 or so bands that will eventually have treaty rights to all or virtually all of the fish on B.C.'s salmon-rich Fraser River. We now are entrenching a race-based commercial fishery. This is wrong: it is no different than designating a race-based restaurant industry.

This treaty gives to certain natives special rights based on race but takes away from other Canadians basic rights we all take for granted. For example, other Canadians living on Tsawwassen land will lose their constitutional right to vote for their local government. That is, the 160 natives living on the reserve will make the decisions for the 700 other Canadians who live there and pay taxes. This offends the very basic tenets and principles on which British Columbia and Canada operates.

“In British Columbia everyone, no matter where they were born, their ethnic background, their religion or their race, is equal. This treaty stands opposed to the very glue that makes the British Columbia such a wonderful place to live and work,” concluded Cummins.

Contact: John Cummins, M.P.
(613) 992-2957, (cell) (604) 970-0937, (604) 940-8040 or www.johncummins.ca