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## First Nations right to reject offer says local negotiator



B.C.'s first nations have rejected a provincial offer an aboriginal rights and title, a move supported by the local Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group.

Peter W. Rusland/file

By [Krista Siefken - Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial](#)

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A decision to scrap the provincial government's offer on aboriginal title and rights in B.C. brings new opportunities, says the chief negotiator at the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group.

Robert Morales supported to move to abandon the government's discussion paper — a proposal on aboriginal rights and title that has been set aside by the province's aboriginal leaders.

"There were several issues (with the proposal) that the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group and myself discussed," explained Morales, who oversees treaty negotiations for HTG's six local First Nations.

"The scope of recognition didn't go as far as the Supreme Court of Canada has gone — there was no discussion about recognition of exclusive rights and there was no recognition of exclusive management of resources, so it's really cast in terms of shared rights with the province."

That's problematic, considering this recognition is the aboriginal community's first aim.

"The concept of recognition is something we have been calling for — it has to be there before the rest of the issues can be dealt with," Morales said.

Which is one of the reasons aboriginal leaders, through lawyers and the First Nations Leadership Council, are putting together their own proposal.

"The leadership council is travelling across the province, and we've asked for one of its sessions to be held in our territory, so we may have a session in Duncan to discuss the proposal," said Morales. "But there is a lawyer and policy advisory working group that has been established and then at the all-chief gathering in August they'll go through the new document that'll emerge from that process."

This new process means the tossing of other contentious proposals in the discussion paper — such as reconstituting B.C.'s 203 bands into about two dozen "indigenous nations" and bringing in a provincial Indigenous Nations

Commission to determine “who proper title and rights holders are” — and replacing them with aboriginal-endorsed priorities.

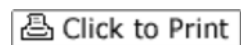
“There is, of course, a desire to continue discussing some of the concepts that were in the original paper,” added Morales.

“I think there’s a window of opportunity here to move forward in dealing with the Crown-Aboriginal relationship and dealing with the history of denial in British Columbia in a positive away, but there was certainly a lot of concerns and mistrust with the original discussion paper, and I think that’s why it has been rejected by many, many communities and leaders.”

— with files from Tom Fletcher

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