

Hwlitsum Join Table

By Philip Raphael

South Delta Leader
26 August 2005

A small, local first nation group is hoping there is strength in numbers to help in its quest to gain ground in a treaty talks.

Chief Raymond "Rocky" Wilson told the South Delta Leader this week that the Hwlitsum band has joined the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group which already represents six other communities at the treaty table-Chemainus, Cowichan Tribes, Halalt (Gulf Islands), Lake Cowichan, Lyackson and Penelakut. The term Hul'qumi'num refers to the language spoken by seven separate, but closely related groups in the Georgia Strait area (Tsawwassen First Nation speak Halkomelem, a related language).

"This means we are entering the treaty process with them and will negotiate fully as a group entity," Wilson said. "It's an alliance which, we're confident, will allow us to proceed."

The Hwlitsum have been shut out of treaty discussions since the local group has yet to attain official band status, something that is still being sought. And since much of the land the group is laying claim to overlaps with that of the Tsawwassen First Nation (TFN), the prevailing attitude has been for the Hwlitsum to strike an agreement with TFN which is nearing acceptance of a treaty.

The Hul'qumi'num group has laid claim to land north of Parksville on Vancouver Island, and down into the coastal waters of Washington State, along the Fraser River east of Hope, and south west along portions of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

With the addition of the Hwlitsum's 400 or so members it will boost the Hul'qumi'num group's total to around 10,000 members, Wilson said. The local band was granted acceptance in late July, and fine details of their inclusion are still being worked out, he added.

Al Grove, a lawyer who has been working for the Hwlitsum said the Hul'qumi'num group has a recognized place at the treaty table and is currently at stage four of the six-stage treaty process.

Robert Morales, chief negotiator with the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group said the inclusion of the Hwlitsum will effectively give the band a voice at the treaty table where they previously had no representation. It will also strengthen the treaty group's connection to the Fraser River basin area.

"We see this as a good resolution for all those involved," Morales said.

As for how the Hwlitsum will change the state of current treat negotiations, Morales said that is being worked on and represent some of the fine details which need to be resolved before an official announcement is made.