

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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First Nations Leadership Council Raises Concerns over Fast-Tracked Fossil Fuel Expansion Without First Nations Consent

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) – The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is deeply troubled by the coordinated efforts of the federal and provincial governments to fast-track new fossil fuel infrastructure and energy export proposals in British Columbia under the pretext of economic development and national interest. First Nations have been clear: reconciliation cannot coexist with unilateral decisions that undermine First Nations' rights, title, human and treaty rights, the standards of free, prior, and informed consent, and the constitutional duty to consult and accommodate.

First Nations maintain inherent rights and responsibilities throughout our respective territories. Any proposal affecting First Nations lands, waters, resources, or future generations must be explored in partnership with, and with the free, prior and informed consent of, the Nations whose rights and territories are directly impacted. Attempts to accelerate approvals through political deals between Crown governments fundamentally conflict with the Crown's legal and constitutional obligations.

“Once again, Crown governments are trying to frame fossil fuel expansion as a nation-building exercise while sidelining the very communities who will be affected or endure the destructive climate impacts,” said UBCIC President Grand Chief Stewart Phillip. “We celebrate and acknowledge the incredible advocacy of the Coastal First Nations who have successfully defended the north coast from a new pipeline; however, we note that southern First Nations have not yet even been consulted about a new pipeline through their territories. First Nations will never consent to the erosion of our rights in the name of convenience or political expediency.”

First Nations hold diverse perspectives on their stewardship responsibilities, economic development and resource projects. Those decisions rest exclusively with each Nation to determine what is best for their territories, communities, and families. Crown governments must respect our authority to shape our own futures, free from political pressure or coercion.

“When it comes to decisions about our own territories, First Nations are not stakeholders—we are rights holders and governments,” stated BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “Any bid to fast-track major projects must begin with respect for First Nations jurisdiction and meaningful Nation-to-Nation engagement. Crown governments cannot claim to support reconciliation while pursuing processes aimed at side-stepping consent, dismantling safeguards, or strong-arming First Nations into preset outcomes.”

The FNLC calls on Canada and British Columbia to uphold their legislative and constitutional duties under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (British Columbia), and the Constitution Act, 1982. Economic uncertainty cannot be used to justify abandoning these vital commitments or diminishing the constitutional rights of First Nations.

“Economic development can be sustainable, rights-based, and led in partnership and mutual benefit with First Nations,” said FNS Political Executive Robert Phillips. “The path forward cannot be dictated through agreements made between Crown governments before our communities have been meaningfully engaged. First Nations have consistently called for economic predictability and prosperity for everyone in British Columbia, including recognition of First Nations jurisdiction, stewardship, and authority.”

The FNLC urges the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia to immediately engage directly with First Nations governments before pursuing any new fossil fuel infrastructure proposals that will greatly impact the land, air, and waters. All future economic decisions must fully respect First Nations’ rights, title, human and treaty rights, while upholding the duty to consult and the honour of the Crown.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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