



Wei Wai Kum Nation Campbell River Band

1650 Old Spit Road, Campbell River, BC, Canada V9W-3E8

Tel.: (250) 286-6949

Fax: (250) 287-8838

TOLL FREE: 1-877-286-6949

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Campbell River, Wei Wai Kum/ Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ Territory

July 19, 2024

Re: Wei Wai Kum Demands Delay in K'ómoks Treaty Initialing – Vows to Protect Against Serious Potential Infringements to Rights and Title

Wei Wai Kum is demanding a delay in the proposed K'ómoks Treaty initialing scheduled for July 22, 2024. There are serious unresolved issues including deep infringements of Wei Wai Kum and Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ aboriginal rights and title. The Treaty, as written, would also extinguish rights and claims of the Walitsama, a tribe of the Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ, many of whose descendants are currently members of the Wei Wai Kum and We Wai Kai First Nations. It would also give K'ómoks fishing and hunting rights and the right to negotiate co-management across Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ Territory, including in Wei Wai Kum core Territory in Campbell River and Loughborough Inlet.

“We generally support all First Nations in their quest to reclaim their lands and governance through Treaties”, states Wei Wai Kum Elected Chief Councillor Chris Roberts. “However, K'ómoks has grossly over-stepped their territory and is trying to use the Treaty process to take away the lands, waters and rights that our ancestors fought and died for”.

History and Conquest

Wei Wai Kum, based out of Campbell River, is one of the First Nation groups of the mighty Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ Nation. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ conquered significant areas of the east coast of Vancouver Island and the Mainland. The first Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ ancestors originated at *Táka*, in Topaze Harbour on the mainland, northeast of present-day Sayward. It was at this site that the first ancestor, the great Chief *Weqaʔyi*, urged his people to tie four war canoes to the mountain with a long cedar rope to survive the great flood. According to the history, two of the canoes broke away and founded Nations on the north coast and what is now Washington State. Two remained and became the Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ. From here, Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ expanded outward, eventually conquering territories all down the coast to south of Comox.

According to Indigenous law, Territory and rights could only be gained by war, inter-marriage or ceremony. The Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ were a military force and many former occupants from the Salish Nations of mid-Vancouver Island and the mainland were conquered by them and retreated during this conquest.

The ancestors of the K'ómoks people were among the Salish groups who were driven south by the Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ in the early 1800s. By the early 1840s, the Liǵʷiɫdaǵʷ exclusively held the lands and

waters from northern Johnstone Strait to south of Comox, including what is now known as Sayward and the Salmon River watershed. So strong was Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ hold and authority that other First Nations were forced to pay a toll to transit Seymour Narrows, which was originally called Yaculta Rapids after the Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ people. Yaculta is an anglicized form of Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ.

When renowned ethnographer Franz Boas visited Comox on November 12, 1886 he observed: "When we arrived [at Comox] the Indians were having a great feast. The Lequittig (Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ), who speak the same language as the inhabitants of Alert Bay, lived in the first villages. These and the Komoks were formerly open enemies, and the Le'quittig frequently attacked the Comox, took them captive, and sold them to the north as slaves. As a result, the southern tribes never go farther north than this place.

The Comox live in the last houses of the settlement.... The Comox spoke two different languages.... I discovered that they have combined with the Penntatish (Pentlatch)."

As Elected Chief Roberts states: "K'ómoks seem to have forgotten this history and are ignoring Indigenous law. Instead, they are using the Treaty process to try and claim Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ Territory".

The Walitsama, the Salmon River Reserve and the 1940 Indian Act Amalgamation

The Walitsama were one of the early tribes of the Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ. They were centred at Salmon River and consequently, Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ was granted a Reserve there in 1886 by the federal government. However, the federal government failed to help protect the Reserve against aggressive and encroaching settlers. Some of the Walitsama were encouraged by the Indian Agent to amalgamate with the K'ómoks First Nation with whom they shared some relations. There was an amalgamation vote in 1940 which was very problematic but which Canada regarded as valid. The amalgamation promised that there would be two chiefs and that the two bands would fully share all K'ómoks and Walitsama Reserves and all assets from the Reserves. This was an *Indian Act* process and did not transfer Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ rights and title but did theoretically affect the Reserves.

K'ómoks and the federal government have failed to honour the 1940 amalgamation. The commitment to the two chiefs and the sharing of all Reserves and assets was completely disregarded. Today there are over 300 Walitsama descendants who are currently listed as members of the Wei Wai Kum or We Wai Kai Nations. K'ómoks refuses to recognize them as members. K'ómoks are pushing to take full fee simple ownership of the Salmon River Reserve in their Treaty and to completely extinguish the rights of the Liḡʷiḡdaḡʷ people to the Reserve.



House Post and House of Walitsama Member, Johnny Moon at Salmon River Reserve, c. 1914

“I can’t believe the governments have let K’ómoks get so far with this”, states Elected Chief Roberts. I am a Walitsama descendant as are many of our Members. How can the federal and provincial Crown talk about recognition and reconciliation while at the same time supporting a K’ómoks Treaty that extinguishes Liǵʷiǵdaǵʷ title to one of our Reserves?”

The Path Forward

“Wei Wai Kum are prepared to take any necessary steps to protect our rights and Territory”, states Chief Roberts. “This is not only our elected Chief and Council. Our Hereditary Chiefs have an important role in managing and protecting our Territory and some of our Chiefs hold seats and rights in the Salmon River watershed. We have engaged with our Hereditary Chiefs, and they are behind our statements and position and we will support our Hereditary Chiefs in doing what they need to do under our laws and culture”.

However, Wei Wai Kum would prefer to reach a resolution through respectful negotiations. Chief Roberts notes “If K’ómoks would acknowledge their history but also their inter-relations with Liǵʷiǵdaǵʷ, we could work with them. Unfortunately, they have been using the Treaty process to try and claim our Territory. In the meantime, Canada and BC are desperate to get a treaty so continue to push this forward. We are demanding that the governments decline to initial the Treaty until these major issues are resolved. We expect the governments to take a pause and that K’ómoks will meet with us to find a respectful resolution.”

Contact: Chief Councillor Chris Roberts (ph: 250-286 6949);
Email: chrisroberts@weiwaikum.ca