



## Chief Marilyn Slett: Message on Self-government

No right is more sacred to our Nation, to our people, than the right to freely determine our social, economic, political and cultural future. The fullest expression of Heiltsuk Rights and Title is practicing self-government. This is what we are moving towards with the *Tuígila* “to make a path forward” Agreement.

It means that the outside governments will no longer decide which laws will be introduced and passed, or which priorities are important to our community. We will have ultimate authority over our own affairs. Our governance structure will be developed by our members through a community constitution and our

government will be open and accountable to our members.

Self-government does not mean we lose existing “benefits” (health, education, etc) currently received through the Indian Act and other government acts or policies. The Heiltsuk are **NOT** engaged in treaty negotiations.

Advancing reconciliation is part of the broad mandate that has been supported by our community. Along with the *Tuígila* “to make a path forward” Agreement, we have the *Haítcístut: Framework for Reconciliation*. *Haítcístut* or ‘turning things around and making them right again,’ has laid the foundation for *Tuígila*. Our focus for these negotiations will be on collaborative support for a sustainable and healthy Heiltsuk economy, shared decision-making, revenue sharing, management of lands and resources, and jurisdiction.



## Chief Marilyn Slett: Message on Self-government (CONTINUED)

A self-government agreement will give us the tools we need to move forward. We have the technicians, professionals, leaders and the knowledge to implement a forward-looking and positive agreement.

Reaching agreement on Heiltsuk self-government will be a community driven process. It will result in a healthy community with increased employment and education opportunities, a healthy sustainable economy, increased housing, and a renewed commitment to language and culture. It will also mean we will make decisions about leadership, citizenship, and government operations.

We are on the road to become a more prosperous community but we have to keep moving forward. As we continue our work on self-government it is important that we hear directly from you about your vision for the future of our Nation. We cannot accomplish what we need to do without your ongoing trust and

support. We look forward to your input as we continue moving towards a self-government agreement.

Over the past years the Nation has taken major steps to assert our sovereignty and regain control over our lives. We began by taking control over the education of our children. Our next step was to take control over our membership but we are limited to the rules in the Indian Act. We also rejected the Indian Act form of governance that dictated how we chose our leaders and enacted our own Election Code.

Through Reconciliation we can begin the process of enacting our own laws and give notice to Canada that we want to enter into negotiations to develop new relationships with them that recognize our jurisdiction, clarify where we have shared jurisdiction, establish appropriate financing for self-governance, and preserve our aboriginal rights and title.



# Tuígila Agreement: a pathway to negotiate the implementation of Heiltsuk Nation Title and Rights



For many decades we have been engaged in various processes to improve our economy, protect our resources and increase our jurisdiction and authority over issues that impact our lives.

At the same time Canada and British Columbia have made efforts to move beyond the legacy of human-rights abuses involving Indigenous peoples. More recently they have undertaken reconciliation negotiations with some First Nations throughout Canada.

Rather than continue down a path that could lead to litigation or processes like treaty that didn't meet our needs the membership made the decision to take part in what Canada and British Columbia refer to as a reconciliation process that would move us closer to self-government and close the socio-economic gap.

First Nations communities continue to have the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in Canada. Household and family incomes remain lower than average, and reliance on government transfers remains high. One of the most urgent tasks facing Indigenous leaders, their communities, and provincial and federal governments, is improving these social and economic conditions. Our goal in *Tuígila* is to design culturally legitimate and practical governance arrangements for our community, as well as to develop capacity as we move forward.

We have been engaged in negotiations with Canada for the past three years. *Haitcistut: Framework for Reconciliation Agreement* - to turn things around, and make things right again - is the foundation of our work. In part our goals are to

create a sustainable and healthy Heiltsuk economy, manage our lands and resources, and increase our authority jurisdiction over issues that impact our lives.

*Tuígila* "to make a path forward" Agreement for Implementation of Heiltsuk Title, Rights and Self-government, is the next step in advancing our agenda. *Tuígila* provides us with a strong framework to achieve this goal. During this process we will seek title, rights and inherent jurisdiction to our entire territory.

The self-government work will be carried out in a phased approach. Heiltsuk and governments will initially focus on lands in non-common (overlap) claim areas.

The areas to be focused on in *Tuígila* include:

- Demarcation of Aboriginal Title lands
- Establishment of Heiltsuk Aboriginal title lands by agreement
- Reconciling provincial and federal laws with Heiltsuk Laxvais
  - o Includes management of Heiltsuk land, waters, subsurface, biosphere and all resources
  - o Developing models of management of lands and resources
- Developing revenue sharing models
- Developing a Papagvala model
- Developing a Heiltsuk self-government model

*Tuígila* will enable our people to make informed choices about what Heiltsuk governance solutions will work best for us. These solutions will need to be both culturally legitimate and practical. With those twin characteristics our governance will be strong and successful. We will have both a credible and effective governance system where other governments have to recognise and engage with Heiltsuk solutions that close the socio-economic gap.





## Reconciliation and **Positive Change**

The decision to enter “reconciliation” discussions with Canada and British Columbia wasn’t taken lightly. Internally it meant going to uncomfortable and sometimes contentious places. Despite decades of wanting to find alternatives to prolonged political and economic gridlock there still exists some reluctance to embrace change. We’ve demonstrated that change is possible – that there are ways and processes that can improve our economy and social issues.

We understood that trying to create change too quickly could be problematic if we didn’t build a strong foundation from which to work. Part of building that foundation was to clearly outline what our community **didn’t** want to see or happen as a result of various processes we are involved in.

Specifically we have been directed to:

- Not to engage in a “treaty like” process
  - o The process we are involved is Heiltsuk solution oriented one that will result in making positive change
- Ensure this or any other agreement doesn’t take away our ability to “benefit” or participate in any federal government funding, program or initiative
  - o We will not negotiate away those benefits
- Change to Protect our Aboriginal Rights and Title
  - o Our Aboriginal Rights and Title are not on the table and never will be

Staying true to our goals and being aligned with community values is a major focus of our team. This means always maintaining our clarity about our people’s and the conditions we need to move forward together on this journey..

We have accomplished much in a short period of time. The socio-economic gap between us and Canadians will close as we continue to move forward.



HEILTSUK NATION  
PHOTO: TASHI CAMPBELL





## Community Engagement

Membership engagement has always been an important part of the work we do as we plan for the future. Engaging membership helps ensure our work is relevant and effective.

We did it when we were in the treaty process. We hosted update meetings, gave presentations to various groups in and outside the community, distributed newsletters and factsheets, and established committees on specific areas like fisheries, membership and land. In fact, many of the members of the fisheries treaty committee became members of both our Land and Marine Use Planning committees.

The reconciliation team has hosted numerous meetings to update our members on progress made. We have distributed newsletters and created a video. As we negotiate a self-government agreement we will continue to communicate and engage with our citizens.

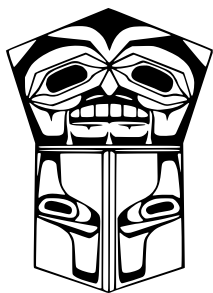
Our team understands that engagement will build deeper, stronger and more trusting relationships. Being able to have a say in how we plan our future will improve the implementation of decisions as it encourages a feeling of ownership over project outcomes and visions for our future.

Engagement will provide opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes - as well as informing us on policy issues that will impact our lives. It is built on the idea that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts our membership should have a say in the decision making around it. Together we can build a healthy community, forge healthy relationships and find meaningful solutions to complex issues.

How do we stay connected on Reconciliation during Covid-19? As people are adjusting to the new normal of social distancing we must come up with new creative ideas to talk about Reconciliation. Let's work together to find and embrace solutions that will keep us connected.

The coronavirus pandemic will impact how we engage with our community. It already has prompted the increased use of online engagement tools to connect many communities with vital information. With our immediate future subject to many uncertainties we need to find ways to stay connected so we can continue the work of planning for our future.

Maintaining strong engagement has always been important, but in our now largely work from home environment, it's more critical than ever.



## Haíłcístut News

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