

EXCERPT FROM

SUMMARY REPORT: COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2012 COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

NELSON FEEDBACK

Introduction

The information contained in this excerpt¹ is the direct feedback received by the Columbia River Treaty Review Team from attendees at the November 2012 Columbia River Treaty Review community consultation sessions.

Background

The Columbia River Treaty Review provided an opportunity to increase the Province's understanding of Basin residents' interests and values. The Province wants to ensure the implications of Treaty options on those interests are communicated to, and well understood by, Basin residents, and that those residents have full opportunity to provide input to help inform Provincial recommendations on the Treaty.

Nelson Community Session

The Nelson session, held at the Rod and Gun Club, was notable for several reasons: it drew the largest crowd (105), it was the stage for a protest, and it attracted the highest percentage of younger participants – more than one quarter were under the age of 30.

¹ The full Summary Report for the November 2012 Community Consultation can be found at <http://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/6/2012/07/Treaty-Review-November-2012-Public-Consultation-Summary-Report1.pdf>

The protest was in support of the Sinixt who, it was felt, should be officially consulted during the Treaty Review process.

During the small break-out discussions, one break-out group focused on the topic of First Nations consultation. Aside from the repeated request that the Sinixt should be formally consulted, a participant suggested that the First Nations consultation should be more open, transparent and overlap with the public process, although others noted that First Nations in general prefer to be consulted government to government.

At the same break-out session, one person commented that, while it was reassuring to hear that the discussion of archeological sites will be included at the March conference, it is important to name the sites to give them some identity as they are a very sensitive issue. The person noted a large part of aboriginal claims are based on these sites.

Another break-out group suggested that climate change needs more attention, and a concern was voiced that historical data may be already out of date. The participants were reassured when informed that the modelling done for the Columbia River Treaty Review is based on relatively recent data, with the time frame going through until 2050.

There were questions with regards to getting ocean-going salmon back to the Columbia Basin and whether removing the dams might be an option. The discussion that followed included comments that the power would have to come from elsewhere, and that the flood control for communities is also a critical role for the dams.

Attendees questioned whether the original residents impacted had been appropriately compensated for the impacts of the Treaty dams.

Those attending the workshop were keen to know how the U.S. was likely to act with respect to the Treaty and to understand what values were being considered in the U.S. analysis. On being told that different lobby groups have different agendas, from minimizing electricity production costs or flood incidents to managing flows for fish values or irrigation, participants commented on how managing water flows in meet U.S. needs in some areas - for instance flood incidents and fish values - resulted in negative consequences to Basin residents. In general, participants felt the Treaty was currently working well.

When one break-out group was asked the question: “Do you think the Treaty should continue or terminate, and why?” the answers were overwhelmingly in the ‘continue’ category, but not without careful consideration. There were comments such as “continue as the damage has already been done and we have learnt many ways to mitigate it,” and “continue but look at taking the dams out in the long term.”

Amongst the same group, some suggested the Treaty be terminated but most wanted it to continue, or continue with amendments. The group reinforced comments made earlier in the evening - bringing the salmon back, getting youth more involved, and more First Nations involvement.

There were a number of recommendations around process, Treaty options, compensation, water levels and future presentations, from Nelson’s four small group discussions.

It was suggested that the scope of the Treaty Review consultation is too narrow and should be broader than just about water levels.

Members of one break-out group recommended that the provincial government either continues with the Treaty, or opts for Treaty Plus, and that it should be for a shorter period of time (e.g. less than 60 years) because values and priorities change over time. One person commented that Canada should wait and see what the U.S. does before deciding to terminate or continue the Treaty.

With respect to water levels, it was suggested that Kooconusa Reservoir should be used more for flood control and that allowing Kooconusa water levels to rise during high flow periods would decrease impacts on Kootenay Lake (where more people are impacted.) Kooconusa residents should be appropriately compensated for any impacts resulting from higher water levels. Linked to water levels was the suggestion that the Grohman Narrows site be examined for future dredging or excavation

In Nelson there were many ‘big picture’ comments, such as the requirement of a holistic view of managing salmon in the whole of the system, and not to manage just for only single interests. Also more money from Canadian Entitlement should go toward research on climate change, and ecosystem improvements.

Other comments included food security being critical, so there is a need for sustainable agriculture; that socio-economic mitigation issues be addressed much faster; and that BC Hydro or the Province consider installing a hydro-electric generating station at Duncan Dam.

It was suggested that for future presentations or communications about the Treaty Review, the Team should consider:

- Having less lingo and technical information (especially from BC Hydro)
- Have a film to visually illustrate Treaty options (that could also be used in schools)
- Visuals in newspapers to explain the options
- BC Hydro and the Province should show how different communities are going to compromise
- Get more youth involved by going to the schools

The Provincial Treaty Review Team committed to holding an additional Nelson meeting in 2013 if invited.