Declaration of Tsawwassen Identity & Nationhood

Preamble

We are the Tsawassen People, comprising the Tla’amin Nation, known as the People of the People – People facing the sea), descendants of our kwal̓el mi̊leł̓ (ancestors) who exercised sovereign authority over təməxʷct (our land) for thousands of years. Tsawwassen People governed under the ancient (advice) and guidance of si’em (leaders), wc̓ëł (high-born women) kwθe (brothers), and sqʷey (speakers) through countless generations.

We honour the ni saʔel kwal̓el mi̊leł̓ (words of our ancestors) who preserved our history, our kw̓ełk̓etq̓et (language) and protected our inheritance. We lift our hands to our ancestors and Elders who imparted wisdom (teachings), stə̓mwx̱ (stories), and q̓əyəł (advice) that allowed us to maintain our unique identity and way of life.

We honour our children and future generations who will ensure these teachings carry on.

On this historic day, Tsawwassen First Nation declares that:

Traditional practices and sacred ceremonies directed governance functions in our longhouse. Today, our traditional government and institutions evolve into the establishment of the Tsawwassen Government. Historically, our leaders were responsible to the People and acknowledged and considered their voices on all important matters. These traditional principles and institutions are reflected in the Tsawwassen Constitution and the Government Organization Act.

The lands, ecosystems and resources within our traditional territories have always been essential to our way of life. Our ancestors acted as stewards and guardians to control access to our lands and resources in order to protect our way of life and our economic foundation. These traditional values are reflected in the Land Act; the Land Use Planning & Development Act; the Fisheries, Wildlife, Migratory Birds and Renewable Resources Act.

Our historical lineage predates the arrival of settlers to our lands. We have maintained our identity through ancestral names that carry the history of our people and that connect us back to generations from long ago. Our traditional practice to recognize our chains of kinship and to collectively determine the criterion for our citizenship, including the right of our People to choose to remain on or reside away from our lands is reflected in the Membership Act.

Through our teachings we understand that we must always extend our hand to support one another to ensure all Tsawwassen People have the opportunity to achieve their full spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual potential.

We will continue to uphold these traditional values as reflected in the Education, Health & Social Development Act and the Children & Family Act.

Historically, a complex socio-economic system played an important role within our community and in cooperation with neighbouring tribes. Accumulation of wealth was attributed to spirit powers. Wealth was important for subsistence, trade, gifts and to qeˀwet (pay for services). In the past, practices to re-distribute wealth were based on traditional sharing principles and collective responsibility to ensure all the People thrived. These principles are reflected in the Economic Development Act, the Financial Administration Act and the Property Review and Judicial Proceedings Act and the Constitution and the Government Organization Act.

On this historic day, Tsawwassen First Nation declares that:

Our People adhered to customary principles regarding the responsibilities and conduct of our leaders in how they represent the People. Likewise, respected leaders and Elders provided advice and wise counsel to settle disputes. These traditional principles will continue as reflected in the Administrative Review and Judicial Proceedings Act and the Conflict of Interest Act.

The Tsawwassen People exist as part of two worlds: traditional and modern-day. We now institute the system where our two worlds can co-exist. We have connected our Fundamental teachings together with universally held principles of responsible government to establish the Tsawwassen Government and to enact Tsawwassen Laws for the betterment of our People.