

# Declaration of Tsawwassen Identity & Nationhood

## Preamble

We are S̓əwəθn M̓steyəx̓w (*Tsawwassen People – ‘People facing the sea’*), descendants of our kwəθə syəw̓nec̓t (*ancestors*) who exercised sovereign authority over təməx̓wct (*our land*) for thousands of years. Tsawwassen People were governed under the səniw (*advice*) and guidance of siʔem (*leaders*), sciʔeł (*high-born women*) hiwaq̓w (*headmen*), and sqʷiq̓w̓el (*speakers*) through countless generations.

We honour the ni sqwel kwəe syəw̓nec̓t (*words of our ancestors*) who preserved our history, our hə́h̓q̓m̓íh̓emq̓ən (*language*) and protected our inheritance. We lift our hands to our ancestors and Elders who imparted syaw̓ən (*teachings*), s̓x̓w̓x̓w̓əyem (*stories*), stiləm (*songs*) and q̓w̓əyeləx (*dances*) 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.

We honour the Creator from whom all life flows as the source of our spirituality. We will uphold our fundamental belief system to maintain harmony with all of creation. The deep pride we hold with regard to our xeʔxeʔ syaʔys (*sacred traditions*) enhances our sense of belonging in this world. We will continue to protect our spiritual healing and purification sites and the sacred resting places of our ancestors.

Today, the Tsawwassen Government will enact a suite of contemporary laws that are fundamentally based on traditional laws and principles that have been carried through each generation. By enacting Tsawwassen Laws, we reaffirm these traditional principles and transmit them to subsequent generations in a manner that has relevance in modern society.

Today, Tsawwassen Laws will be passed in our sacred longhouse – the place where we governed ourselves in the past. We will carry on the tradition of putting the nail on the wall by the door – to hang up any hard or negative feelings before coming into this place to work together for our people – past, present and future generations.

## 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, eco-systems 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 qeʔwet (*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 Taxation Act.

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 hə́h̓q̓m̓íh̓emq̓ən language is of vital importance to our cultural inheritance. It is a personal and cultural expression of our identity as a People through which our history and our way of life is taught. It both describes the world we live in while also connecting us back thousands of years. The Tsawwassen Government is determined to protect and promote the education and utilization of our language, culture and traditions as reflected in the Culture & Heritage Act.

Culture is the foundation of our existence and survival. Today we will establish a Standing Committee on Culture and Language to continue work on the incorporation of hə́h̓q̓m̓íh̓emq̓ən and Coast Salish culture into our Laws and Institutions.

Of equal importance are traditional laws and xeʔxeʔ syaʔys (*sacred traditions*) that will not be written or documented. Those traditional laws and practices continue to apply and will be shared with future generations in strict accordance with our teachings.


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.

On this historic inaugural session, we make the transition from the Tsawwassen Band Council to the Tsawwassen Government. We reaffirm that today marks the day we fulfill our aspiration to implement our inherent right to political autonomy, economic independence and true reconciliation with Canada and British Columbia.

This declaration is made on the Effective Date of the Tsawwassen Treaty, April 3rd, 2009.

Signed:

  
Chief Kim Baird

  
Councillor Laura Cassidy

  
Councillor Andrew Bak

  
Councillor Andrea Jacobs

  
Councillor Remo Williams