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Local governments in B.C.
Via e-mail only

June 8, 2026

Open Letter: *Heritage Conservation Act* Transformation Project

Dear local governments in B.C.,

We are writing regarding our collective work to modernize the *Heritage Conservation Act* (HCA) through the *Heritage Conservation Act* Transformation Project (HCATP).

It has come to our attention that the Union of B.C. Municipalities (UBCM) has chosen not to sign the Province's required confidentiality agreement and therefore will not be fully participating in the remaining stages of the HCATP. We strongly believe that any concerns UBCM and local governments may have with the HCATP are best addressed through continued engagement and collaboration.

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) asks local governments to communicate to UBCM their desire to fully re-engage in this vital work.

The HCA has not been substantively updated in 30 years and is widely recognized by First Nations, archaeologists, and heritage professionals as being inadequate to prevent irreversible harm to sites and places of profound cultural and spiritual significance to First Nations. Across B.C., First Nations continue to experience the destruction and disturbance of their burial sites, sacred places, and cultural belongings under a legislative framework that does not respect First Nations' basic human and constitutionally protected rights, or the Province's commitments and obligations under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

UBCM has acknowledged the need for modernization and reform. Public statements from UBCM throughout the HCATP have reflected shared concerns regarding inconsistent processes, uncertainty regarding risk, implementation challenges, and the need for clearer legislative tools and guidance. UBCM has also raised questions regarding implementation timelines, operational capacity, permitting processes, and the practical application of proposed reforms. These are important issues that should continue to be addressed through constructive dialogue and the highest level of ongoing engagement.

While First Nations, UBCM, and other participants in the HCATP may not agree on every aspect of the proposed reforms or related process, there remains broad recognition that the existing HCA is outdated. The HCATP represents a vital opportunity to work together to create a more respectful, transparent, and effective framework for heritage protection in B.C. Achieving this requires First Nations being meaningfully involved in decisions affecting our ancestors, belongings, territories, and cultural heritage, while improving clarity and predictability for local governments, proponents, and others involved in development and land-use planning.

We recognize that UBCM and local governments have concerns regarding the Province's required use of confidentiality agreements in the HCATP. FNLC and First Nations have

also expressed concerns regarding the Province's required use of confidentiality agreements in the HCATP and other legislative initiatives. However, it is currently the Province's standard procedure to use confidentiality agreements when confidential information, such as cabinet confidential policy and legislation-related materials, is shared with partners. The Province's requirement is not unique to the current government or the HCATP.

Despite this, to facilitate broader information sharing and transparency and to gather further feedback from First Nations, local governments, and stakeholders on proposed changes to the HCA, the Province produced a non-confidential Technical Policy Paper which includes a significant level of policy detail. With the public release of this paper, the Province has enabled broader access to detailed policy materials than previous governments. Participants have therefore had access to substantially more information and engagement opportunities throughout the HCATP than has historically been made available during legislative development processes of this nature.

UBCM and local governments fully participating in the HCATP provides the best opportunity to shape outcomes, improve implementation, and ensure concerns are heard and addressed. A modernized HCA can support more informed decision-making, reduce conflict and uncertainty, strengthen relationships between First Nations and local governments, and help prevent harm before it occurs.

Many local governments across B.C. have worked hard to build respectful relationships with their First Nations neighbours and understand the importance of protecting cultural heritage and ancestral sites. We acknowledge and commend those efforts and the local governments that have chosen to engage in this work in good faith. The protection of ancestors, burial sites, sacred places, and cultural belongings is not solely a First Nations issue, it is a shared responsibility that reflects the collective values and interests of all British Columbians.

Again, the FNLC asks local governments to communicate to UBCM their desire to fully re-engage in this vital work. Together, we will advance long-overdue reforms that better protect cultural heritage while supporting clearer, more respectful, and more effective processes for everyone involved.

We look forward to continuing this important work together without further delay.

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

On behalf of the FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT



Robert Phillips



Hugh Braker



Huy'wu'qw Shana Thomas

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip



Chief Councillor Linda Innes



Chief Marilyn Slett

On behalf of the BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terry Teegee', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee

CC: Union of B.C. Municipalities
Joint Working Group on First Nations Heritage Conservation
B.C. First Nations