

## De Jong announces Maa-nulth land transfers

*Thursday, April 09, 2009*

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Alberni Valley Times



Provincial Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister Mike de Jong has announced that six parcels of provincial Crown land will be transferred immediately to the five Maa-nulth Nations, as part of the Final Agreement signed Thursday.

All told, the five Barkley Sound Nations will receive 24,550 hectares of land, some of which is former Indian Reserve land and some former Crown land. de Jong's announcement came as a surprise to most of the guests who packed Alberni Athletic Hall.

"As a province, we would lie to begin transferring the land now," de Jong said. And following the signing of the Final Agreement by federal Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl and the five Maa-nulth chief councillors, de Jong sat down to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with each of the individual leaders.

Under the MOU, Huu-ay-aht First Nation will take early transfer of a 31.5-hectare waterfront parcel on the north shore of Grappler Inlet. The former Crown land is adjacent to Bamfield.

Toquaht Nation will receive a 19-hectare parcel at Stuart Bay near the entrance to Ucluelet

Harbour, while Uchucklesaht Tribe will receive approximately 55 hectares at Green Cove and Limestone Bay. This waterfront parcel sits at the entrance to Uchucklesit Inlet and is the site of a store owned and operated by Uchucklesaht.

Ucluelet First Nation will receive early transfer of Lot 468, a 34-hectare parcel adjacent to Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. The land has been identified as key to Ucluelet First Nation's economic development plans.

Kyuquot-Checklesah First Nation will receive 1.8 hectares located at Fair Harbour, and a 35-hectare parcel on Amos Island, near the First Nation community of Houpsitas. They currently lease the Fair Harbour property as part of its marina operation.

Following the ceremonies, de Jong said the Maa-nulth process has been an education for himself and his Liberal colleagues, including Premier Gordon Campbell. He acknowledged that his government was perceived with mistrust by many First Nations people.

"It's been a journey, and as you learn - as you engage, and as you speak with and better understand some of the challenges and some of the history, you better appreciate where some of the opportunities lie - and how you can move forward," de Jong said. "When we talk about the New Relationship, it's clear from this and numerous other agreements that it is more than just talk - it is reality. It's a different way of recognizing that we're all here to stay and we're far better off in working together to share the benefits that we're blessed with here in B.C."