

Maa-nulth Treaty passes with speed

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It's been a highly-charged week in Parliament, with a summer election just barely averted. But MPs managed to work together to bring the historic Maa-nulth Treaty to fulfillment in record time.

In a polarized forum which is known to move at glacial speed, Bill C-41 took a mere four days to pass into law, beginning with first reading in the House on Monday, June 15.

Tuesday must have been pretty hectic - second reading in the House; considered in the committee of the whole in the House' third reading and passage in the House. Then over for first reading in the Senate.

Wednesday: second reading in the Senate; debated and referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, where witnesses gave testimony; committee passes C-41 without amendment and reports to Senate.

Thursday was a little more leisurely: third reading in the Senate, and then over to Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who affixes her signature to signify Royal Assent. Maa-nulth is now the law of the land.

"It's good to know that it's totally ratified. Now we have a real target," Huu-ay-aht chief councillor Robert Dennis said.

For Dennis, the Huu-ay-aht community consultation process continues. On Tuesday, he and his team met with members in Vancouver, and on Wednesday night, it was Victoria. On Thursday, the meetings moved to Nanaimo. Next week, it's closer to home, with a meeting in Pachena Bay on Tuesday and Port Alberni on Wednesday.

Dennis said he has heeded warnings from other nations that have received treaty settlements, only to see the money - and the opportunity for a better future - evaporate through poor planning and leadership.

"We have to be very careful," he said, adding that there are plenty people ready to do business with First Nations with coming into new money - and not all of them have aboriginal people's best interests at heart.

"They're already lining up out there to talk to us - especially about forestry," Dennis said.

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