



# UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

## News Release

August 22, 2025

### UBCIC Acknowledges Landmark Cowichan Title Decision

(x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil Waututh)/ Vancouver, B.C. – August 22, 2025) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) acknowledges the historic Supreme Court of BC decision in *Cowichan Tribes v. Canada*, which on August 7, 2025, recognized Aboriginal title of Cowichan Tribes, Stz'uminus First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, Halalt First Nation, and Lyackson First Nation to nearly 1,900 acres of lands in Richmond, including submerged shoreline.

This judgment reaffirms and strengthens the recognition of Aboriginal title in B.C. and across Canada. By recognizing Aboriginal title even where Crown grants and fee simple titles has been issued, including submerged lands, the Court underscored the enduring strength of Indigenous rights under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated “Cowichan’s achievement represents a monumental recognition of Aboriginal title and rights. This case is also a reminder that Nations are forced into the courts because the Crown continually fails to honourably recognize and implement our rights. Reconciliation must begin with governments respecting what the courts have already confirmed. The Crown has seen this coming for decades yet continues to delay and deflect. By failing to negotiate in good faith, and by choosing litigation over reconciliation, the Crown creates confusion, fuels public fear, and deepens divisions.”

“This case is not about seizing private homes or threatening homeowners,” said Chief Don Tom, UBCIC Vice-President. “Cowichan is not seeking to invalidate interests held by private landowners. First Nations have long warned that if governments refused to recognize and implement Aboriginal title in a principled manner through negotiations, these questions would inevitably end up in the courts. Framing this decision as a threat to private property stokes fear and unfairly scapegoats First Nations.” He continued, “We acknowledge the contributions of Elders and leadership after 513 days at trial; a grueling experience of cross-examination of oral history. We all know that when negotiations break down with the Crown, Nations are left with few pathways to pursue justice. Participating in colonial courts is always a last resort and a use of resources.”

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“While the Province has already announced plans to appeal, UBCIC stresses that reconciliation cannot be delayed or denied” stated Chief Marilyn Slett, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer. “While governments have required responsibilities they must fulfill the work of reconciliation, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminds us Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as well as communities, companies, educational institutions, not-for-profits, and the general public all have roles to play. UBCIC recognizes that there are fears and uncertainties as we confront the legacies of colonialism, but reconciliation is ultimately about building a stronger province and Canada for all peoples. By upholding Indigenous title and rights, we can ensure that future generations live in vibrant, just, and united communities.”

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*UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.*

For more information, please visit [www.ubcic.bc.ca](http://www.ubcic.bc.ca)

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