

Minister Fraser Misleading British Columbians on Government's Lack of Engagement with Stakeholders

June 29, Chilcotin BC. After years of being ignored, watching their asset values plummet, and having their business operations forceably curtailed, residents and business owners in the Chilcotin region of British Columbia are organizing in an effort to gain a seat at the negotiating table. The future of their homes, livelihoods, and business operations hang in the balance due to the secret land claims negotiations taking place between the Province, the Federal Government and the Tsilhqot'in First Nation.

"Canadians for Fairness and Transparency", an amalgamation of concerned groups across the Chilcotin (www.canadiansforfairnessandtransparency.ca), is gaining traction as the potentially devastating economic risk communities face is being exposed, despite efforts by the provincial government to diminish their concerns by denying the legitimate threat.

Petrus Rykes, long-time Chilcotin resident and business owner, has been witness to the considerable economic damage already being done to tourism operators and businesses and is frustrated at the pattern of denial that seems to be the Province's way of dealing with concerns around the topic.

"When I read that BC Minister of Indigenous Relations Scott Fraser is claiming that everyone is being kept up to date, I couldn't believe my eyes because that is absolutely untrue. Not only are we not being informed, but our own MLA Donna Barnett is being kept in the dark despite countless inquiries. She is just as frustrated as we are", says Rykes.

"The Minister should pay attention to his own consultant's report that recommended offering input to stakeholders and compensating all affected landowners. Conditions are absolutely untenable, and could get exponentially worse as the secret negotiations continue. They act as if non-Indigenous citizens have no rights in the process. As British Columbians and above all, Canadians, we are supposed to be living in a democracy, but so far it seems all our government is doing is selling us out."

Canadians for Fairness and Transparency challenges Minister Fraser to demonstrate his openness to transparent communication with Chilcotin residents, ranchers, tourism operators and all the families and communities whose livelihoods are threatened, by supporting their request for a seat at the negotiating table as their futures hang in the balance.

"You can't just claim to be keeping stakeholders informed when you're really not, and hope the problem goes away", says Rykes, "The outcome of these current negotiations will affect thousands more residents and businesses, and they need to know their rights will be respected."