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# Indigenous Governance and Authority in Climate Action

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# Foreword

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) was created in 2008 with an endowment from the Government of British Columbia to support evidence-based climate policy. This investment in our university-based network was groundbreaking and remains a core strength of the organization.

In fulfilment of PICS' mandate, this Insights Series elevates leading evidence at a pivotal moment for climate policy in B.C. Drawing on academic expertise from across the province, the series is designed to inform the 2025 independent review of CleanBC, British Columbia's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change.

When CleanBC was launched in 2018, climate action was a public and political priority. While concern about climate change remains widespread, it has increasingly been overshadowed by more immediate pressures, such as rising costs of living, strained public services, and growing geopolitical instability. Intensifying climate impacts exacerbate each of these challenges, which increases the complexity and opportunity for bold climate solutions. Now is not a time to retreat from ambition. Rather, it is a time for integrated solutions and public policy that unlock energy transformation, reduce climate risk, and increase prosperity at local, regional, and global scales.

The Insights Series highlights the deep connections between climate action and other top issues facing British Columbians: housing, affordability, economic competitiveness, Indigenous reconciliation, regional economic development, and fiscal efficiency.

B.C.'s climate leadership can be renewed—not by repeating the strategies of the past, but by evolving CleanBC to meet the realities of today.

**Disclaimer:** This paper was funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS). The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of PICS.

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A member of the Gitanyow Lax'yip Stewardship Guardians performs a cultural burn in 2025. Credit: Marty Clemens

## Executive summary

Indigenous legal orders and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) establish the foundation of Indigenous Nations' role in climate action. The Government of British Columbia's 2019 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), followed by the Declaration Act Action Plan in 2022, require provincial laws and policy to be consistent with UNDRIP and fundamentally change the context for CleanBC, launched in 2018. To effectively engage with Indigenous communities on climate action and operate within a reconciliation framework, a renewed CleanBC must embrace these principles.

The actions identified in the [BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#) ("Climate Strategy") and the [Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC 2023-2030](#) ("Disaster Action Plan") are anchored in Indigenous self-determination and the inherent right to self-determination. To build on this First Nations leadership, CleanBC must shift

its approach from integrating Indigenous "knowledge and perspectives" toward recognizing the laws, decision-making authority, and governance arrangements of First Nations in the Province.

*“This paper identifies six areas where CleanBC can more fully align with First Nations legal authorities, UNDRIP, the Climate Strategy, and the Disaster Action Plan by recognizing Indigenous governance and supporting territorial authority.”*

In the big picture, climate action for Indigenous Nations is deeply intertwined with healthy territories and self-determination. A narrow focus on emissions alone risks

overlooking the deeper drivers of the climate crisis—resource extraction, the exclusion of Indigenous authority, and inequities imposed on Indigenous Peoples. CleanBC’s orientation around greenhouse gas emissions reductions does not address the root problem of the climate crisis: social, political, economic and legal systems that achieve dispossession, drive inequality, and exploit the more-than-human world—and is therefore inadequate. A “green economy” goal itself does not respect local and global Indigenous authorities and UNDRIP any more or less than an economy built on fossil fuels.

This paper identifies six areas where CleanBC can more fully align with First Nations legal authorities, UNDRIP, the Climate Strategy, and the Disaster Action Plan by recognizing Indigenous governance and supporting territorial authority:

- » **land use planning** that expands collaboration and embeds Indigenous legal responsibilities into biodiversity and carbon goals
- » **coastal protection** through strengthening Indigenous governance in marine stewardship and advancing Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)
- » **food sovereignty** that restores Indigenous food systems as integral to health, culture, and resilience
- » **energy systems** which enable Indigenous Nations to govern energy development in their territories, including recognition of Indigenous utilities and revenue-sharing
- » **emergency response** structures that embrace Indigenous-led emergency management and prescribed fire practices
- » **project financing** for permanence that builds long-term funding mechanisms for climate action, drawing on successful conservation finance models

Together, these priorities signal a path forward. In addition, an important opportunity exists for CleanBC activities to amplify the extensive experience of ecosystem-based collaborative governance already underway in B.C. CleanBC renewal is an opportunity to embed reconciliation at the heart of climate action—through Indigenous-led funding, restoration of territories, and full respect for free, prior, and informed consent—while building durable climate resilience for the future.



Members of the Alliance of BC Modern Treaty Nations attend the Premier's Forum at the Nisga'a Lisims Government House, June 2025. [Source](#)

# 1. Context and overview

Responses chosen to mitigate ecological and climate crises reflect the way in which we originally understand and diagnose the issue. CleanBC and the CleanBC Roadmap to 2030 (“Roadmap”) are one such way of diagnosing and responding to these crises. While this insight paper will predominantly highlight and respond to six themes within CleanBC’s approach, suggesting ways in which those can better reflect the Province of British Columbia’s (the “Province”) commitment to the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), it is important to first step back and consider the bigger picture of the problem. We understand CleanBC’s carbon-centric perspective where a green economy largely upholds a socio-legal economic system premised on the physical and jurisdictional dispossession of Indigenous peoples to be at the heart of ecological and climate crisis. One can see this disconnect where the Roadmap notes that “[a]s the plan is

implemented, we will have renewed opportunities to build stronger partnerships and better incorporate Indigenous rights, perspective and interests into provincial climate plans and policies” (at 12), yet the foundational pathway actions (pp 13-14) do not include First Nations authority. Nor do they address carbon extraction from First Nations territories throughout the province and globally without consent.

*“The 2019 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) could unlock greater Indigenous leadership on climate resilience.”*



The Declaration Act Action Plan was released in a joint announcement in March 2022. The plan outlined 89 specific actions every ministry in government needed to take to align with DRIPA. [Source](#)

Our task is to identify new considerations arising from the 2019 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (“DRIPA”) and the 2022 Declaration Act Action Plan (the “Action Plan”), as well as specific policy reforms that could unlock greater Indigenous leadership on climate resilience. We note the clear and direct instruction from the Action Plan to this CleanBC review at Action 2.12: “Collaboratively develop and implement CleanBC and the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy to support resilient communities and clean economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples that benefit our shared climate and advance reconciliation.”

*“The context for this CleanBC Review has fundamentally changed since the plan’s inception.”*

In aligning our comments with the extensive strategy and action planning completed by First Nations that establish priorities for action—most specifically the First Nations Leadership Council’s BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan (“Climate Strategy”) and Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in BC 2023-2030 (“Disaster Action Plan”)—we note that the focus of these resources is primarily on enabling self-determination in both climate

action and respecting title and rights to territories to restore governance relationships. For example, the four pathways in the Climate Strategy under which strategies and actions fall are inherent title and rights, capacity and leadership, land and water protection, and climate response and preparedness.

We begin with three points of context for the CleanBC Review that shape its orientation and outcomes. First, settler society and the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples, as permitted through approvals issued by the Province, is often responsible for greenhouse gas emissions and is imposing climate change on Indigenous peoples. Second, since the establishment of CleanBC, the Province has committed to implementing UNDRIP and DRIPA, both of which are vehicles for recognizing Indigenous authority and operationalizing free, prior, and informed consent. The context for this CleanBC Review has fundamentally changed since the plan’s inception. Important questions for the review include: What is the role of CleanBC in UNDRIP implementation and how must CleanBC support Indigenous Nations’ climate resilience and authority? Third, for Indigenous communities climate resilience is entwined with healthy territories. Therefore, a clear focus for CleanBC action is First Nations governance of restored territories, which includes involvement in decisions about territories that the Province has unilaterally wielded in the past. We demonstrate that leadership on climate action is inseparable from achieving the commitments made in the Action Plan, and much of the involvement of Indigenous peoples in CleanBC initiatives will be supporting self-determination, the inherent right to self-government and collaborative governance.

From the perspective of Indigenous legal orders and UNDRIP, we highlight the foundation of Indigenous Nations’s role in climate action—supported by CleanBC—as strengthening:

- » land use planning;
- » coastal protection;
- » food sovereignty;
- » energy self-determination;
- » emergency governance; and
- » project finance for permanence.

These topics are familiar to CleanBC activities as they relate to one or more of the existing CleanBC “Indigenous and Government Collaborative Actions” underway.<sup>1</sup> However, our analysis more clearly identifies the mandate arising from Indigenous legal orders and UNDRIP implementation as expressed through the First Nations Climate Strategy and Disaster Action Plan. In addition, an important opportunity exists for CleanBC activities to amplify the extensive experience of ecosystem-based collaborative governance already underway in British Columbia. For each of these topics we summarize reported CleanBC action, consider how that action can better reflect Indigenous authorities, and provide insight into priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program.

In presenting these perspectives the authors do not claim a pan-Indigenous perspective. For one, given its global nature the climate crisis manifests in place-specific ways, meaning Indigenous Nations will bring various concerns and interests to the fore. In addition, differences exist within and between Indigenous Nations and these differences reflect the legal and self-determining authority of distinct Indigenous Peoples and territories. As such, one size-fits-all approaches are not possible.



The B.C. government is protecting vital coastal ecosystems, creating new jobs and advancing sustainable fisheries and economic opportunities in the Northern Shelf Bioregion (also known as the Great Bear Sea) in partnership with First Nations, the federal government and donors. [Source](#)



Coastal Guardians with the Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance care for kelp beds off the coast of B.C.  
Credit: Markus Thompson

## 2. The big picture

CleanBC adopts a depoliticized and colonial orientation to climate change. In the description “About climate change” CleanBC indicates that “Human activity is the main driver of climate change.”<sup>2</sup> While this narrative highlights the anthropogenic causes of current climate change, it obscures the fact that the climate crisis has always been driven by the interests and decisions of decision makers and institutions who have benefited financially and politically from resource extraction that is at the heart of the climate crisis and at the expense of Indigenous Peoples and the more-than-human world. In supporting its orientation, CleanBC goes on to state that “Many of our everyday choices cause pollution—from what we buy, to what we make, to how we get around.”<sup>3</sup> Such statements cast a universalized version of society and entrench a liberal orientation focused on individual choices while ignoring systemic factors that not only constrain those individual choices but also function to uphold the positions

and interests of those with the power and agency to create and shape those structures.

*“The climate crisis has always been driven by the interests and decisions of decision makers and institutions who have benefited financially and politically from resource extraction.”*

This depoliticization of the climate crisis is not limited to CleanBC or B.C. but is part of a larger trend in climate politics. Internationally, the widely cited goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial standards is a political choice that favors business as usual while sacrificing the world’s most vulnerable populations, human and more-

than-human who have contributed the least to the climate crisis, to bear the brunt of the resultant harms. While there are benefits in the CleanBC actions to promote “resilience” and “adaptation” to climate change in Indigenous communities,<sup>4</sup> fostering “resilience” is just a modern version of requiring Indigenous peoples to adapt to colonial harms.<sup>5</sup>



The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions entered a Relationship Protocol with the First Nations Leadership Council in 2025, to strengthen First Nations climate leadership, advance climate priorities, and generate meaningful benefits for First Nations in British Columbia.

CleanBC fails to account for this bigger picture in various ways. While not exhaustive, the following are worth noting. CleanBC and the Roadmap are carbon centric. Limiting carbon emissions is of course important, but not sufficient, for multiple reasons. First, while we leave authoritative commentators to remark on the adequacy of the carbon reduction targets, we note the inadequacy of the political aspects. From an Indigenous perspective where societal health is tied to territory, to measure carbon reductions against 2007 emissions is misleading and troubling given the exponential rise in carbon emissions over the long twentieth century. Additionally, CleanBC operates within a fictional calculation as it only considers reductions in carbon emissions happening **within** the boundaries of BC, but excludes emissions from fossil fuels extracted within B.C. but burned elsewhere. Of course, carbon, regardless of where burned, impacts globally through myriad harms. Carbon extracted in B.C. and burned elsewhere directly harms Indigenous Peoples within the province.

It is therefore contradictory and hypocritical to promote, for example, CleanBC on one hand while actively growing a

Liquefied Natural Gas extraction and export industry within B.C. on the other. The same is true in the inverse scenario. The electric vehicles, for example, upon which CleanBC’s plan to reduce emissions from transportation hinge are a product of the extraction of “critical minerals” that occurs on Indigenous lands without consent and into a global supply chain that ultimately benefits individuals outside those territories the most. Carbon, regardless of where burned, fuels climate crisis and extraction in one location for the benefit of a group of people in another and is the hallmark of colonialism and imperialism and is inconsistent with UNDRIP, locally and globally.

*“CleanBC exists against the backdrop of unceded Indigenous lands and authority.”*

A “green economy” on its own does not respect Indigenous authority and UNDRIP any more or less than an economy built on fossil fuels. For example, First Nations leaders have significantly critiqued the new B.C. law that exempts designated “infrastructure” projects from usual permitting processes.<sup>6</sup> Biodiversity loss, approximately 70 per cent faster than pre-industrial averages, is primarily a result of land and resource use, and the movement of people and goods on a global scale without limits.<sup>7</sup> While “green”, CleanBC is clear that “[a]long with our actions to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, CleanBC provides an effective blueprint to build our economy” and succeed in the global market.<sup>8</sup> Such logic presupposes that the only problem with the current economic system is primarily carbon, which is not true.

Finally, UNDRIP uses the language of free, prior, and informed consent. Conversely, Canada’s Aboriginal law is built around the notion of consultation, and even while using the word consent,<sup>9</sup> governments and Canada’s highest court have been clear that Indigenous Peoples have “no veto” when it comes to government action.<sup>10</sup> The inability to say no is a perverse notion of consent. CleanBC exists against the backdrop of unceded First Nations lands and authority. Dispossession has occurred both physically, through the stealing of First Nations lands and resources, and jurisdictionally, through the imposition of Canadian and Provincial law and governance over pre-existing Indigenous authorities. Ultimately, while

CleanBC envisions, for example, working to “integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into government climate action,”<sup>11</sup> what is at issue is not just knowledge or perspectives, but governance and decision-making authority over lands and territories. Opposed to true self-determining authority, incorporating and restricting Indigenous laws, governance, and decision-making authority *into* those that Canada and B.C. has established is the modern working of colonialism.<sup>12</sup>

While our perspective is that CleanBC and “net zero”<sup>13</sup> do not address the root problem of the climate crisis—social, political, economic, and legal systems that achieve dispossession, drive inequality, and exploit the more-than-human world—and is therefore inadequate, in the big picture, we now turn more directly to CleanBC and opportunities to bolster First Nations governance and authority.



A signing ceremony and government-to-government (G2G) forum with leaders of the five Maa-nulth Treaty First Nations, held under the 2018 G2G Agreement. The forum focused on discussing, prioritizing, and collaborating on topics of mutual interest, including land and resource management, as well as treaty implementation issues. [Source](#)

# 3. Themes

Of the 130 actions laid out in CleanBC, 13 of which are aimed specifically at Indigenous Peoples, we have chosen to focus on six main themes: Land Use Planning, Protecting Our Coasts, Improving Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Security, Energy Self-determination, Emergency Governance, and Project Finance for Permanence. In each section we summarize the action,

reflect on how the approach addresses Indigenous authority, and point toward how CleanBC could amplify Indigenous governance and self-determining authority in these areas. For policy context directing the CleanBC review we have included the specific wording from the Action Plan under each theme.

## DECLARATION ACT ACTION PLAN

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act requires the Province of B.C. to create and implement an Action Plan to “achieve the objectives” of and make its laws consistent with UNDRIP.<sup>14</sup> The 2022 Action Plan establishes the following themes and goals that focus on self-determination and inherent governance for Indigenous peoples and their territories.

THEME 1	GOAL 1
<b>Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government</b>	Indigenous Peoples exercise and have full enjoyment of their rights to self-determination and self-government, including developing, maintaining and implementing their own institutions, laws, governing bodies, and political, economic and social structures related to Indigenous communities.
THEME 2	GOAL 2
<b>Title and Rights of Indigenous Peoples</b>	Indigenous Peoples exercise and have full enjoyment of their inherent rights, including the rights of First Nations to own, use, develop and control lands and resources within their territories in B.C.
THEME 3	GOAL 3
<b>Ending Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination</b>	Indigenous Peoples fully express and exercise their distinct rights, and enjoy living in BC without interpersonal, systemic and institutional interference, oppression or other inequities associated with Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination, wherever they reside.
THEME 4	GOAL 4
<b>Social, Cultural and Economic Well-being</b>	Indigenous Peoples in BC fully enjoy and exercise their distinct rights to maintain, control, develop, protect and transmit their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, languages, food systems, sciences and technologies. They are supported by initiatives that promote connection, development, access and improvement, as well as full participation in all aspects of BC’s economy. This includes particular focus on ensuring the rights of Indigenous women, youth, Elders, children, persons with disabilities and 2SlGBTQQIA+ people are upheld.

## I. Land use planning

**Action 2.6:** Co-develop strategic-level policies, programs and initiatives to advance collaborative stewardship of the environment, land and resources, that address cumulative effects and respects Indigenous Knowledge. This will be achieved through collaborative stewardship forums, guardian programs, land use planning initiatives, and other innovative and evolving partnerships that support integrated land and resource management.

The Province committed to revitalizing regional land use planning in 2018 in partnership with First Nations.<sup>15</sup> As a key action on reconciliation and achieving international biodiversity targets of achieving 30 per cent protection of lands and waters by 2030, land use planning for Indigenous territories can address Indigenous priorities and legal responsibilities, ecosystem health and economic use of the environment. Modernized land use planning also recognizes the need for integrated attention to water, with water sustainability plans under the Water Sustainability Act providing the only statutory tool that enables water goals to bind land use decisions.<sup>16</sup> There are 17 collaborative planning initiatives underway with more than 50 Indigenous organizations. Seven involve land use, eight involve forest landscape, and two involve water sustainability plans.<sup>17</sup>

There is no reporting on how land use planning helps meet the CleanBC objectives. However, Indigenous leadership organizations have identified land and water protection as a key aspect to a climate response: “The province, in collaboration with interested First Nations in BC, to identify specific land and water restoration and protection proprieties and targets by region...with timelines for implementation”.<sup>18</sup>

*“Indigenous leadership organizations have identified land and water protection as a key aspect to a climate response.”*

This modernized land use planning process stands on the shoulders of globally significant and innovative collaborative landscape governance in several regions in B.C., the foundation for which are Indigenous-led land use plans. For example, the Great Bear Rainforest agreements commit the Province and seven First Nations to achieve a return to



B.C. Premier David Eby meets with First Nations leaders during the ninth B.C. cabinet and First Nations Leaders' Gathering in February 2025. [Source](#)

70 per cent range of natural variation (old growth) over a 250 year timeframe, which created a new form of protected areas called conservancies that acknowledge First Nations rights and created territory-specific ecosystem-based forestry standards.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in Haida Gwaii, the Council of the Haida Nation and Province agreed to create the Haida Gwaii Management Council composed equally of Haida and Provincial members to make decisions on protected areas, forestry and heritage preservation, and resulting in a decrease in the annual allowable cut by 50 percent.<sup>20</sup> The governance arrangement flowing from these land use plans and agreements change decision making in those territories, work to implement long-term ecosystem-based frameworks that reflect Indigenous legal responsibilities, and support carbon offset programs and benefits for participating First Nations. Considerable experience and learning have occurred through these processes that can significantly inform current land and water planning.

Priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program to strengthen Indigenous authorities and achieve Action Plan commitments include:

- » Take direction from the Land and Water Protection goal of the Climate Strategy.
- » Document and conduct training for provincial staff across ministries on the experience and learning from existing successful collaborative land use planning and governance processes.
- » Expand the forest landscape planning processes to include land and water planning that reflects First Nations legal responsibilities throughout territories.
- » Using existing success stories such as the Great Bear and Haida Gwaii, clearly identifying the carbon sequestration/ GHG reduction benefits to Indigenous- or co-led land use planning.
- » Integrate land use planning with water, coastal and food security planning, which reflects an understanding of traditional territories as foodscapes.
- » Expand carbon offset programming for First Nations.
- » Quantify the GHG reduction potential of water sustainability planning.
- » Identify long term carbon sequestration/GHG reduction objectives, goals and targets for all land and water planning processes.



Towhill and Blowhole, Masset, Haida Gwaii. *iStock*

## II. Coastal protection

**Action 2.6:** Co-develop strategic-level policies, programs and initiatives to advance collaborative stewardship of the environment, land and resources, that address cumulative effects and respects Indigenous Knowledge. This will be achieved through collaborative stewardship forums, guardian programs, land use planning initiatives, and other innovative and evolving partnerships that support integrated land and resource management.

CleanBC states that they have “worked with coastal First Nations to ensure the health of marine ecosystems and resilience of coastal communities.”<sup>21</sup> The main mechanism used in reaching this goal is the B.C. Coastal Marine Strategy (the “Marine Strategy”), B.C.’s first comprehensive marine management vision intended to reflect a 20-year vision for coastal waters within B.C.’s jurisdiction.<sup>22</sup> Co-development of the Marine Strategy began with First Nations in 2022 and resulted in the creation of a Policy Intentions Paper<sup>23</sup> and later the What We Heard Report<sup>24</sup> prior to its finalization. The Marine Strategy is composed of four broad themes—Healthy Coastal Marine Ecosystems, Resilience to Climate Change, Thriving Coastal Economies and Communities, and Informed Governance—with nine goals and 24 actions within those themes.<sup>25</sup>

that considers both terrestrial and marine activities within and beyond B.C. The jurisdictional complexity of the marine environment means that collaborative stewardship initiatives, such as Parks Canada’s National Marine Conservation Areas Reserve program<sup>26</sup> and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, are important. The Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE) define IPCAs broadly, indicating they are “lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems.”<sup>27</sup>

*“First Nations inherent decision-making authority and Indigenous laws need to take a far more central role throughout the Marine Strategy.”*

The principal weakness of the Marine Strategy is a vision of reconciliation that involves integrating Indigenous knowledge, values, and perspectives into decision making and government programs. While being guided by “First Nations ethics and values” is important,<sup>28</sup> it should not distract from the inherent laws, governance, and decision-making authority First Nations have to steward lands and waters. First Nations inherent decision-making authority and Indigenous laws need to take a far more central role throughout the Marine Strategy.

The Marine Strategy appears to take a narrow view of government-to-government relationships focusing primarily on the Modern Treaty process. In addition to broad critiques of this Treaty process,<sup>29</sup> and the continuation of inherent jurisdiction over marine spaces, it ignores the existence of historic treaties in B.C. that specifically protect the right “to fish as formerly”.<sup>30</sup> The right to fish as formerly is not simply a right to fish, but a right to protect a “fishery” and associated forms of governance.<sup>31</sup> Reversing jurisdictional dispossession



Researchers and Coastal Guardians study kelp health off the coast of Port Hardy. Photo courtesy Danielle Denley

The primary strength of the Marine Strategy is its co-development of a comprehensive vision alongside First Nations. However, the reality of cumulative impacts on the marine environment necessitates a comprehensive approach

over marine spaces is an important step in advancing more collaborative stewardship and marine restoration in aid of carbon sequestration.

Priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program in relation to healthy coasts include:

- » Recognize existing historic treaties and other agreements in what is now B.C. instead of treating the modern treaty process as the primary way to achieve government-to-government relationships.
- » Foreground First Nations' inherent decision-making authority and Indigenous laws in marine stewardship over the integration of Indigenous knowledge and values.
- » As stated in the Climate Strategy, "Develop a resource of best practices and guidelines for those entering First Nations communities to use the land, waters, ocean and resources."<sup>32</sup>
- » Support the expansion of an IPCAs network across the marine spaces.
- » Reduce barriers to the implementation and effective functioning of IPCAs in line with the recommendations of the Indigenous Circle of Experts in the We Rise Together Report.
- » Recognize that First Nations Guardian programs are about reclaiming First Nations jurisdiction and sovereignty and upholding First Nations laws and responsibilities to steward lands and waters, and care for the more-than-human relatives within Indigenous territories.



A fishing boat entering the harbour at Whiffin Spit in Sooke, Vancouver Island. *iStock*

### III. Food sovereignty and security

THEME 2	GOAL
<b>Title and Rights of Indigenous Peoples</b>	<p>Indigenous Peoples exercise and have full enjoyment of their inherent rights, including the rights of First Nations to own, use, develop and control lands and resources within their territories in BC</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b> - Indigenous Peoples have meaningful and sufficient access to abundant and healthy traditional foods and have peaceful enjoyment of their harvesting rights.</p>
THEME 4	GOAL
<b>Social, Cultural and Economic Well-being</b>	<p>Indigenous Peoples in BC fully enjoy and exercise their distinct rights to maintain, control, develop, protect and transmit their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, languages, food systems, sciences and technologies.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b> - Indigenous food systems are recognized and supported in their foundational and interconnected role in providing for cultural, social, environmental and economic well-being.</p> <p>Respect for Indigenous cultures is tangibly demonstrated through Indigenous maintenance, control, protection and development of their cultural heritage resources, intellectual property, art, spiritual traditions, knowledge systems, economic systems, food systems and spiritual and sacred sites.</p> <p><b>Action 4.48:</b> Work with the BC Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food and other Indigenous partners to identify opportunities to strengthen Indigenous food systems and increase Indigenous participation in the agriculture and food sector.</p>

CleanBC states that it is “funding programs that address Indigenous food security.”<sup>33</sup> Specifically, through the New Relationship Trust the Indigenous Food Security and Sovereignty (IFS) Grant provides non-repayable funds that support Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> The grant concluded its third and final year of funding in May 2025. Two funding streams (Planning & Development or Implementation & Capital) were aimed at supporting Indigenous agriculture and food projects. The noted success stories arising out of the funding initiative include Naas Foods help farm in Ahousaht territory<sup>35</sup> and the Tsawwassen First Nations community greenhouse project.<sup>36</sup> It is unclear what CleanBC’s emphasis on Indigenous food security and sovereignty will be now that the IFS Grant has expired, and we note that this funding did not address restoration of territories as core Indigenous foodscapes.

The majority of climate action initiatives within this theme are more broadly aimed at agriculture and helping B.C. farmers in various respects. However, the Roadmap offers little in terms of concrete steps and gives passing reference to the extreme vulnerability and the need for climate resilience within the

fisheries and aquaculture industries. The narrow focus on agriculture largely misses the point. Indigenous territories are Indigenous foodscapes, with many Indigenous traditional governance structures having been formed around seasonal cycles and intimate and reciprocal relationships with lands, waters and more-than-human relatives. Attempted erasure of those forms of social, legal, economic, and spiritual forms of governance went hand in hand with opening Indigenous territories for settlement and European style agriculture. Narratives of Indigenous peoples being uncivilized based on lacking these forms of land use were central to colonialism. Additionally, the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, to the extent that was actually a goal, also took shape through agricultural practice. As such, the focus on agriculture as a path forward is an extension of historic colonial strategy. Instead, the focus should be on restoring Indigenous reciprocal relationships with lands and waters, upholding responsibilities and obligations with the more-than-human world, and through that, the restoration of Indigenous food systems and sovereignty.

The Province already has engaged Indigenous Nations with the objective of creating a provincial food security framework. The report [Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security in a Changing Climate: What was heard from Indigenous Engagements](#) sets out the ongoing challenges of achieving Indigenous food security and sovereignty, a series of helpful recommendations at the provincial and community-based levels, and examples of Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives.<sup>37</sup> In addition to highlighting the ongoing effects of colonization as a central impediment to achieving Indigenous food sovereignty, the report foregrounds how “Indigenous food sovereignty and food security are intrinsically connected to self-determination and access to land.”<sup>38</sup> Likewise, in the Climate Strategy, food sovereignty and restoration of clean, safe, and reliable traditional food in territory comprise three of the 20 Urgent Calls for Climate Action.<sup>39</sup>

Priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program in relation to Indigenous food security and food sovereignty:

- » Recognize the connection between European style agriculture, colonialism, and Indigenous dispossession and move away from agriculture-based solution to Indigenous food security and sovereignty.
- » Develop a vision and strategy for Indigenous food security and sovereignty that aligns with the “Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Food Security in a Changing Climate: What was heard from Indigenous Engagements” report and the recommendations contained therein, as well as the Climate Strategy.
- » Promote the restoration of Indigenous laws and governance that centre on lands, waters, and reciprocal relationships with the more-than-human world, and through that, the restoration of Indigenous food systems and sovereignty.
- » Recognize the central importance of healthy oceans and marine life to coastal First Nations in terms of food systems and food sovereignty and work to provide greater decision-making authority on issues that impact those.



Sockeye Salmon swimming upstream. *iStock*

## IV. Energy self-determination

THEME 2	GOAL
<p><b>Title and Rights of Indigenous Peoples</b></p>	<p>Indigenous Peoples exercise and have full enjoyment of their inherent rights, including the rights of First Nations to own, use, develop and control lands and resources within their territories in BC</p> <p><b>Action 4.43:</b> Co-develop recommendations on strategic policies and initiatives for clean and sustainable energy. This includes identifying and supporting First Nations-led clean energy opportunities related to CleanBC, the Comprehensive Review of BC Hydro, and the BC Utilities Commission Inquiry on the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities.</p> <p><b>Theme 4 Outcomes</b> - Governance of the economy respects, acknowledges and upholds Indigenous rights and interests and First Nations title, is co-led with Indigenous Peoples, and ensures that all First Nations have economic opportunities and benefit from the lands and resources in their territories.</p> <p>Indigenous Peoples freely determine their economic development goals, priorities and strategies, and exercise their right to maintain and develop their economic systems and institutions to support self-governance, along with traditional and other economic activities.</p> <p>The Province and Indigenous Peoples collaborate and participate in ongoing, meaningful, and enduring dialogue to achieve a more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable economy for the benefit of present and future generations that reflects Indigenous values, interests, goals and worldviews.</p> <p>The Province and Indigenous Peoples collaborate through meaningful dialogue to create more inclusive, sustainable and low carbon economies for the benefit of present and future generations and a just climate transition.</p>

Considerable CleanBC action has focused on energy use and development by Indigenous communities, including in the specific action areas of: reducing use of diesel electricity in remote communities; supporting energy projects in Indigenous communities; and supporting Indigenous people to take part in clean energy projects. These actions reflect decades-long advocacy by individual First Nations to, in particular, transition away from diesel-generated electricity and have control of energy development within their communities and territories. These actions occur in the context significant barriers faced by Indigenous communities when attempting to establish their own utilities<sup>40</sup> and clean energy projects in their territories,<sup>41</sup> which has received attention in the Comprehensive Review of BC Hydro and the BC Utilities Commission Inquiry on the Regulation of Indigenous Utilities.<sup>42</sup>

While the focus of CleanBC has been supporting First Nations to develop clean energy, energy self-determination for Indigenous Nations has two spheres, the first being self-determination in community energy provision and use (the existing focus of

CleanBC programs) and the second being governance over energy production within territory. It is this second sphere over which Indigenous communities have little control; most do not consent to the extent of energy development and fossil fuel extraction in their territories.<sup>43</sup> The focus on clean energy implicates Indigenous authority over territory and is a fundamental aspect of UNDRIP implementation. Likewise, the ability to develop clean energy projects within the BC Hydro integrated constellation of production and transmission requires more specific attention to the unique position of First Nations as self-determining in territory, in energy provisioning and in economic development.

As part of the comprehensive review of BC Hydro, in 2020-2021 Indigenous engagement on the process resulted in a summary of Indigenous interests:

- » clean energy economic development opportunities, including in generation of clean electricity and creation of First Nations public utilities;
- » an enhanced and modernized relationship with BC Hydro;
- » compensation for impacts of existing hydroelectric projects on First Nations title and rights or Treaty Rights;
- » sharing of BC Hydro revenues;
- » reliability of electricity services to First Nations communities, energy self-sufficiency and affordability of BC Hydro bills; and
- » alignment of strategic energy policy issues and legislation with [UNDRIP] and [DRIPA].<sup>44</sup>



A new \$200-million contribution agreement between the Government of B.C. and Haisla Nation will support building the infrastructure needed to ensure the Cedar LNG facility runs on clean, B.C. energy – making it one of the lowest emitting facilities of its kind. [Source](#)

Finally, two of the Climate Strategy's Urgent Calls for climate action involve energy self-determination and focus on supporting "First Nations in developing their own Nation-specific climate-related strategies and action plans based on their own needs, priorities, and self-determined processes... [including] energy efficiency strategies". Urgent Call 18 more broadly identifies transformation of energy sources and use in alignment with UNDRIP:

*Support First Nations to rapidly transition to reliable and affordable renewable, non-combustible and/or low carbon energy sources by establishing Indigenous utilities, diversifying clean energy sources, aligning legislation, regulations, policies and programs with the UN Declaration and Declaration Acts, and increasing Crown government support and investments.<sup>45</sup>*

Priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program in relation to energy self-determination include:

- » Recognize in law the authority of Indigenous Governing Bodies to supply energy within their communities via a new entity, such as an Indigenous Energy Board or as co-regulators with the BC Utilities Commission.
- » Ensure government-to-government agreements secure Electricity Purchase Agreements to support the green energy and economy goals of individual First Nations (i.e. the relationship between the Province and Indigenous Governing Bodies directs BC Hydro behaviour).
- » Include energy commitments, constraints and opportunities in land use plans as part of territorial governance.
- » Using a defined percentage of BC Hydro revenues, create in perpetuity a dedicated fund to compensate First Nations for the impacts to territory of BC Hydro infrastructure and use of water.

## V. Emergency governance

### THEME 1 OUTCOMES

The overall emergency management structure and regime in BC is revised, in collaboration with the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples, to enhance Indigenous Peoples' emergency management outcomes through a strong tripartite approach.

**Action 1.10:** Co-develop modernized emergency management legislation (replacing the Emergency Program Act) with First Nations.

**Action 2.11:** Integrate traditional practices and cultural uses of fire into wildfire prevention and land management practices and support the reintroduction of strategized burning.

**Action 2.12:** Collaboratively develop and implement CleanBC and the Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy to support resilient communities and clean economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples that benefit our shared climate and advance reconciliation.

Emergency governance is arguably the area in which the Province has most systemically supported Indigenous authority and, in the past five years, amended laws, policies and practices to enable Indigenous Nations to be partners in emergency governance. Wildfire emergencies, in particular, have escalated in the past decade and First Nations' critiques identified provincial emergency responses as often endangering their members and ignoring their authority.<sup>46</sup> As reflected in the Action Plan, the Province committed to reforming emergency management laws and practice in collaboration with First Nations and was the first jurisdiction in Canada to commit to the leading international standard to reduce losses from disasters, through the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.<sup>27</sup> A key pillar to that reform includes the enactment of the Emergency and Disaster Management Act ("EDMA") that acknowledges the authority of Indigenous Governing Bodies, other governments, and agencies engaged in emergency management and works towards collaboration and coordination of "emergency measures, plans, policies and programs,"<sup>48</sup> as well as recognizes that "the inherent right of self-government of Indigenous Peoples includes authority to make laws in relation to emergency management."<sup>49</sup> As noted by emergency scholar and expert Dr. Jocelyn Stacey, "EDMA is the first emergency statute in Canada that purports to account for climate change and that attempts to align with [UNDRIP]."<sup>50</sup>

The Province has committed meaningful funding and human resources to work with Indigenous Peoples on emergency governance, as reflected in the new planning and response

structures enabled by the EDMA. CleanBC identifies four areas of action relating to emergency governance:

- » partnering with Indigenous Peoples for climate resilience (examples of Indigenous leadership on climate action, tools and resources);
- » funding community-led work to reduce wildfire risk (Community Resiliency Investment Program funding FireSmart and Crown Land Wildfire Risk Reduction);
- » reducing wildfire risks through expanded cultural and prescribed burning; and
- » working with First Nations communities to prepare for climate change (First Nations Emergency Services Society data portal).

While these actions positively provide funding and other resources for Indigenous community-led priorities, given the escalation of emergencies (led by wildfire), their effectiveness depends on timely scaling and acceptance by the settler population. Timely scaling refers to the need to have emergency governance planning; prescribed burns and fuel management planning; and treatment on Crown lands around communities underway for all communities immediately. Ensuring that physical treatments and planning are in place as soon as possible requires a significant short-term dedication of resources. Acceptance by the settler population refers, in

particular, to most people's aversion to smoke in any form. Public education and a shift in perception is needed to support prescribed and cultural burning at appropriate times of year.

Priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program on emergency governance to strengthen Indigenous authorities and achieve Action Plan commitments include:

- » Similar to the scope of the Cultural Burning and Prescribed Fire website, significantly expand planning and training opportunities for First Nations and Indigenous Governing Bodies to increase human and other resources to plan and address emergencies.
- » Prioritize resources to secure Coordination and Collaborative Emergency Management Agreements under the EDMA and delegation and/or consent agreements under DRIPA to clearly align planning and response protocols in each community.
- » Create an Indigenous community-specific fund like the Watershed Security Fund that responds to community needs rather than requires communities to fit into narrow funding criteria.
- » Expand online resources on the various agreements and coordination approaches to emergency management.
- » Partner with First Nations to expand prescribed and cultural burning.
- » Undertake a widespread public education program to appropriately educate and sensitize the public towards controlled smoke outside of wildfire season that supports prescribed and cultural burning.



Firekeeper Joe Gilchrist demonstrates how a cultural burn is started in a pile of sage brush near Savona, B.C. (Harold Dupuis/CBC)jr. [Source](#)

## VI. Project finance for permanence

### THEME 2 OUTCOMES

First Nations benefit socially, culturally and economically from land and resources in their territories, including having access to multiple and diverse streams of revenue to finance their governments and deliver services to their citizens.

**Action 1.5:** Co-develop and implement new distinctions-based policy frameworks for resource revenue-sharing and other fiscal mechanisms with Indigenous Peoples.

While not an identified area of action for CleanBC, many of the reported initiatives relate to funding climate action and leadership. That funding depends on Provincial will and does not reflect Indigenous priorities or the physical and temporal scales needed for the territory-specific realities of long-term commitments to healthy watersheds.

*“Project finance for permanence supports the agreements, laws, and operations flowing from large-scale conservation agreements.”*

Project finance for permanence is a relatively new term for the funding that supports the agreements, laws, and operations flowing from large-scale conservation agreements. This type of financing relies on a diversity of public and private funding to reassure governance/funding partners and affected Indigenous communities that permanent funding is in place to support transitions to a conservation economy and the ongoing work of environmental governance.

In B.C., the most prominent example of project finance for permanence are the various funds managed by Coast Funds in support of the First Nations of the Great Bear Rainforest that have, cumulatively, leveraged \$120 million for a total investment of \$444 million since 2008.<sup>51</sup> In June 2024, 17 First Nations, the Province, and the Government of Canada established the Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence totalling \$335 million for marine stewardship and economic activity in B.C.'s Northern Shelf Bioregion, the largest collaboratively governed marine protected area network in the world.<sup>52</sup>

Priorities for the next iteration of the CleanBC program to strengthen project finance for permanence and achieve Action Plan commitments include:

- » Identify key lessons and knowledge gained from existing project finance for permanence initiatives in B.C. (such as the Great Bear Rainforest).
- » Building on successful carbon sequestration programs, identify what project finance for permanence could mean in the climate arena.
- » Co-create with Indigenous governing organizations ongoing funding mechanisms to support Indigenous climate planning and action.
- » Beyond impact benefit agreements related to forestry activities, identify other permitted activities where increased rents or fees are appropriate for revenue sharing (such as water rents and oil and gas tenures).



Marine protected areas like Gitdisdu Lugyek Kitsu Bay, pictured above, help safeguard sensitive ecosystems, support habitat connectivity, and maintain culturally significant harvesting sites. Photo: Moonfish Media. [Source](#)



A lake near Fort Nelson in remote northern B.C. *iStock*

## 4. Conclusion and moving forward

We have emphasized throughout this brief that Indigenous Peoples and their territories are the receivers of climate change, and that climate action is entwined with healthy territories and Indigenous authority. As noted, some of what CleanBC highlights as climate leadership replicates historic approaches to colonization. The renewal of CleanBC provides an opportunity to reorient the Province's approach to climate action from carbon counting to a more holistic restoration of relationships with healthy territories governed by Indigenous communities.

*“The renewal of CleanBC provides an opportunity to reorient the Province's approach to climate action from carbon counting to a more holistic restoration of relationships with healthy territories governed by Indigenous communities.”*

All of our recommendations build on the objectives and action items identified through the First Nations Leadership Council's Climate Strategy and Disaster Action Plan. Within the six focus areas of land use planning, coastal protection, food sovereignty, energy self-determination, emergency governance, and project finance for permanence, some clear leading approaches emerge. First Nations require their own dedicated and reliable funding for community-level planning and action. Taking the permanent Watershed Security Fund as an example, funding for restoration activities and climate action could be entirely Indigenous-defined and led. Another clear leader is the restoration of territories as integral to food sovereignty, coastal protection, and energy self-determination. Indigenous-led land use planning, emergency governance and project finance for permanence are important long-term strategies for reconnecting relationships and moving towards governance arrangements that reflect UNDRIP.

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