

Schelangen and the Salish Sea Campaign

Lummi is a sovereign Native nation, with Treaty-protected rights and a *Xa Xalh Xechnging* (sacred obligation) to protect and revitalize *Xwullemy*, the Salish Sea bioregion. Our obligation is to the salt and fresh waters, the lands, our ancestors, our sacred sites, our language, our culture, our people and all our relations, human and non-human. We believe what our ancestors have told us: *if we take action now, there is hope for the Salish Sea.*

Schelangen is a term that embraces our entire way of life: our worldview, our culture, traditional lifeways, how we treat one another and how we treat all our relations and the place we call home. When *Xwullemy* is threatened, our *schelangen* is threatened. In working to protect *qwe 'thol mechen* (blackfish/orcas/killer whales), the salmon, and all of *Xwullemy*, we are working to promote, protect, and preserve *schelangen*.

In our Salish Sea Campaign, we are working with a number of governments, agencies, and organizations. Since contact, Western values and science have been imposed on Indigenous efforts. This way of doing business is killing the Salish Sea, and must change. In order to move forward in a good way, we need to integrate Indigenous (in this case, Lummi) values, world view and traditional knowledge with Western worldview, values, and scientific knowledge.

What follows here is an outline of some of our positions and guiding principles and definitions.

Lummi Nation is calling for a moratorium on any new or increased industrial ship traffic or development on the Salish Sea until

- **a comprehensive, inter-jurisdictional, trans-boundary cumulative impact assessment of Salish Sea health** and stressors has been conducted, and conducted in a way that reflects both science and Indigenous ways of knowing.
- **a baseline for Salish Sea health**, as measured in 1985 salmon levels, has been adopted by all involved parties.

Lummi Nation is calling for a **sovereign-to-sovereign meeting with the Crown** to formally discuss relevant Canadian projects, and with **US Senators and top-level agency officials** to oppose additional stressors to the Salish Sea.

A'ahs'qe'xie

A physical thing will have “tangible properties” that you can see, hear, feel, touch, taste. That thing may also have “intangible properties,” like cultural value or spiritual power. *A'ahs'qe'xie* is a Lummi word and principle that recognizes that not only is everything connected in the sacred web of life, but also that the relationships between things have energy and agency. The connections between things are the strands that create the web.

For instance, salmon and *qwe 'thol mechen* are commonly recognized as physical, living things. They also need to be recognized as beings with cultural and spiritual significance. Further, the relationship between salmon and *qwe 'thol mechen* is alive, complex, and has its own power.

Flowing from the principle of *A'ahs'qe'xie* is the truth that the entire web is changed and affected by any change to any strand or thing on that web.

Sovereignty

Sovereign nations acting in good faith come to the table with their own national and cultural identities intact. The worldviews and ways of knowing of each are given equal consideration.

As a sovereign nation, Lummi has an obligation to protect the basic human rights of our citizenry. The rights of our people depend on the health of the ecosystems, culture, and spirit contained within *Xwullemy*. As a sovereign nation, Lummi has the right and the responsibility to treat with other sovereign nations regarding actions that may harm our people and/or our homeland.

Consent and Meaningful Consultation

Customary international law now recognizes the necessity of securing “free, prior, and informed consent” from Indigenous peoples before undertaking a project that would affect those people.

- Lummi understands “consent” to mean saying “yes.” Silence is not consent.
- We expect that if we say “no” to a project, that the project will not happen.
- We understand “informed” to mean that project proponents would gather information about the full impacts of a project, and that this information-gathering would happen in a way that is framed by Lummi ways of knowing and *xal*, which means “true belief.”

- No outside entity has the moral authority to impose values on Lummi by declaring what defines an impact and which impacts are significant

Unless consent is prior and freely given, and unless “informed” fully reflects impacts as defined by Lummi worldview and *xal*, the “meaningful consultation” process is simply a continuation of the colonial encounter.

Although Lummi Nation is south of the border, the Lummi people are part of the Coast Salish population impacted by projects in and around the Salish Sea. Canada has recognized the necessity of consulting with Lummi Nation: the Crown had invited Lummi to testify before the National Energy Board regarding the Trans Mountain Pipeline and before the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency regarding Roberts Bank Terminal 2.

Kwel 'hoy: we draw the line

We are calling for a moratorium on new and/or increased stressors to the Salish Sea

The Salish Sea is dying: orcas, salmon, herring, and seastar populations are at historic lows. Human-caused pollutions and climate change are, broadly speaking, to blame. We need to “stop the bleeding” of the Salish Sea, i.e. take immediate, emergency measures that will prevent further harm.

Lummi Nation is calling for a **moratorium** on any and all new significant stressors on the Salish Sea until a comprehensive, cumulative impact study on such stressors has been conducted; until immediate, effective measures have been taken; and until the Salish Sea has been restored to a baseline of health and sustainability, as measured in 1985 quantity and quality of wild salmon.

Establishing a baseline for salmon population level

The health of the Salish Sea can be measured in salmon. While we would like to see pre-contact levels of salmon restored, what we are pressing for is the restoration of 1985 levels. The salmon population in 1985 sustained both our people and *qwe 'hol mechen*. To understand how best to restore 1985 levels of salmon, we need to understand the various pressures the Salish Sea is currently bearing.

Comprehensive, Cumulative Impact Assessment of the Salish Sea

Lummi Nation is calling for a **trans-boundary, inter-jurisdictional cumulative impact assessment** of current and proposed stressors to the Salish Sea.

At a minimum, the effects of marine vessel traffic and associated development on the Salish Sea must be assessed. Key areas of study include, but are not necessarily limited to, impacts on salmon and fisheries; *qwe 'thol mechen* (resident and transient orca populations); marine and terrestrial cultural and sacred sites; traditional lifeways and associated heritage economies; and larger ecosystems and critical habitat, must all be considered. Lummi/Coast Salish ancestral knowledge must be given as much weight as scientific conventions (i.e., scientific modeling), and the framework for the study must also reflect the principle of *A'ahs'qe'xie*.

Trans-boundary: the salmon, the orcas, Coast Salish linguistic, cultural, and kinship bonds do not recognize the national boundary between Canada and the United States. *Xw'ullemy* is the Salish Sea bioregion, and includes salt and fresh waters, islands and mainland territories. A comprehensive assessment of this bioregion necessarily involves participation from both sides of the Canadian / US border and by Tribal and First Nations.

Inter-jurisdictional: Lummi Treaty rights, fisheries, traditional lifeways, cultural and sacred sites, and relationship to salmon and *qwe 'thol mechen* are impacted by policy decisions of US governmental agencies. Some of these agencies (i.e., USFWS and NOAA) are trustees, charged with fulfilling United States Treaty obligations to Lummi Nation. Other US agencies (i.e. WDFW) co-manage resources shared with Lummi Nation. Presumably there are various agencies on both sides of the border that would necessarily be involved in an effective study.

Cumulative impacts:

An impact is a marked effect or result; significance is implied. When studying the impacts of marine vessel traffic and industrial development upon the Salish Sea:

- a variety of different impacts must be studied,
- the impacts from **all** the projects must be studied,
- and the combined effect of all impacts taken together must also be studied.

Impacts can combine with one another in ways that magnify each other, or result in entirely new impacts. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts because the parts interact with one another.

Types of impacts include both those that can be measured (i.e. annual loss of income to Tribal fishers due to decline in salmon population) and those that are less easy to quantify (the sanctity of a particular site). Adverse impacts to Treaty rights, sacred sites, cultural systems, heritage economies, and spiritual connection to place must be considered alongside impacts to species, ecosystems, and more recent economies.

An example: noise.

Marine vessel traffic creates noise. We need to know *how much* and *what type* of noise each project/development produces AND how much all the projects together produce AND how the different types and overall level of noise affects the life and culture of the Salish Sea.

- To Lummi, “orcas” are *qwe ‘lhol mechen*, which means “our relations under the water.” They are part of our family and our community.
- Orcas use echolocation to hunt.
- Noise disrupts their hunting.
- Chinook salmon are smaller and fewer than they’ve ever been, so noise makes a difficult hunting situation even more difficult.
- Because finding food is so hard, it takes longer to find it.
- This extra time spent foraging is stolen from time that *qwe ‘lhol mechen* would usually spend socializing.
- The erosion of social fabric and family structure affect the physical and emotional health and impact the reproductive capacity and longevity of *qwe ‘lhol mechen*.
- Our spiritual, cultural, and kinship relationships are damaged when *qwe ‘lhol mechen* are threatened with extinction.

Lummi worldview and ways of knowing

The Lummi people have lived in *Xw’ullemy* since time immemorial. They have lived in a reciprocal relationship with the natural world and have cultivated a vast body of knowledge about all facets of the place and the life held within it. This knowledge springs both from long-term observation of, and experience with, the natural world, and from a place-based cultural and spiritual framework.

For instance, Lummi people and *qwe 'lhol mechen* (orcas) are bound by kinship, as evidenced in language (the term means “our relations under the waves”) and in teachings passed down through countless generations.

These ways of understanding and knowing *Xw'ullemy* must be given consideration at least equal to that given to normal science. Not only are these scientific methodologies foreign to this place and relatively young, they were not conceived for the purposes of sustainability and reciprocity, as were the native ways.

An example: qwe 'lhol mechen

Sometimes science and Native knowledge reflect one another. The Lummi term for killer whale is *qwe 'lhol mechen*, which means “our relations under the waves.” Teachings indicate that killer whales are essentially humans in killer whale regalia. *Qwe 'lhol mechen* have dealings with human people, and are part of the Lummi community.

Western science is now coming to similar conclusions, by verifying that orcas have individual personalities, tight family relationships, complex societies, language, tools, traditions, rituals, and culture. Orca intelligence has yet to be quantified, but their brains are proportionately larger and more complex than human brains. Orca brains also have parts not found in human brains; these parts are thought to be related to language and empathy.

The urgent need for Indigenous knowledge

The recent United Nations report stating that 1 million species are now threatened with extinction underscored the importance of Indigenous “knowledge, innovations and practices, institutions and values” in sustaining ecosystems, communities, economies, and quality of life. The imminent threat of catastrophic climate change further calls out for Indigenous knowledge and practices of healthy, reciprocal relationship to Earth life-systems.