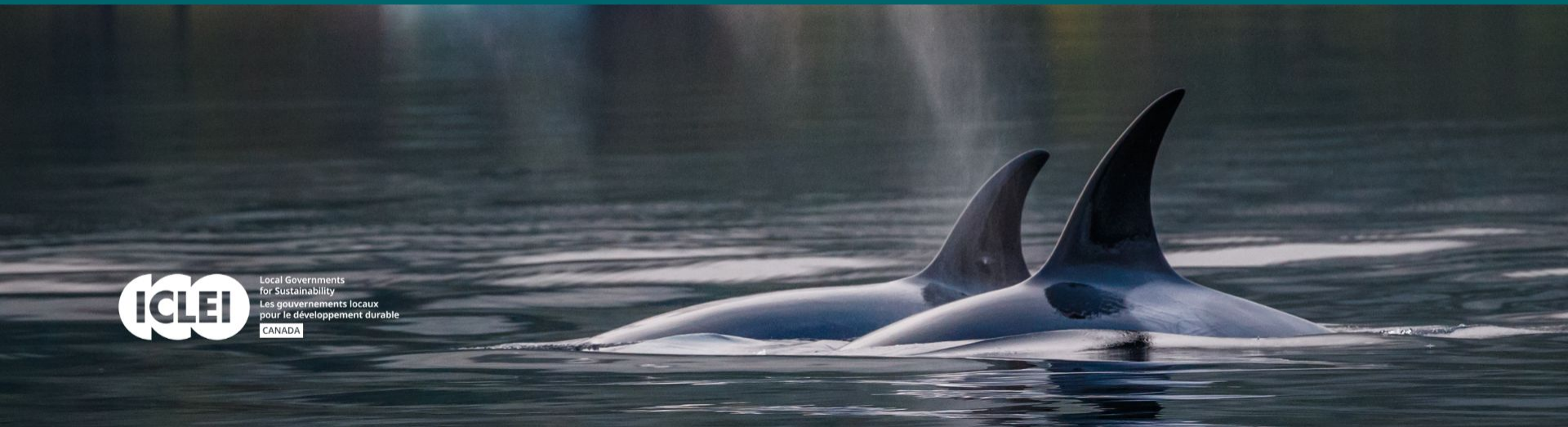
Witnessing Report: Cultivating one heart and one mind

Regional Knowledge Keepers gathering to collaborate on climate action

2026



ICLEI
Local Governments for Sustainability
Les gouvernements locaux pour le développement durable
CANADA

Guiding Protocol

This report seeks to share key learnings from a gathering convened by ICLEI Canada as part of the Coastal Climate Resilience Collaborative.

We respectfully acknowledge that ICLEI Canada's work happens across Turtle Island which is home to distinct First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples since time immemorial. We recognize that reconciliation is a fundamental component to building net-zero resilient communities and ecosystems. We are committed to strengthening relationships with Indigenous peoples and Knowledge Keepers, knowing that reconciliation requires ongoing collective learning, unlearning, reflection, and action. We endeavour to listen to and learn from Indigenous peoples on an ongoing basis in the process of our work together.

The Coastal Climate Resilience Collaborative region includes the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), and shíshálh Nations (Sechelt), whose stewardship and enduring connections continue to guide the care and revitalization of these lands, waters, and airs.

We recognize the responsibilities that come with living on these territories, and we commit to advancing reconciliation by building respectful, collaborative relationships that honour Indigenous laws, protocols, title, rights, knowledge, and leadership. We thank our ancestors who walked before us, our relatives who walk alongside us, and our future generations who are preparing to join us.

Acknowledgements

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- Charlene SanJenko
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Giveaways

- Talaysay Tours (tea)
- Kilala Events (vase)

Ki'Lala EVENTS & DÉCOR

TALAYSAY TOURS

Opening in a Good Way

On June 16, 2026, Knowledge Keepers, Youth, Elders, Matriarchs, 2SLGBTQ+ peoples from shíshálh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, and səlilwətaɬ Nations gathered to share their guidance with the Coastal Climate Resilience Collaborative on climate resilience and adaptation along the Coast Salish territories.

Invitations for attendance of community members from each Nation were shared broadly through Nations' climate team staff representatives and referral protocols, as well as personal relationships. Ten community members participated in the gathering and generously shared from their personal perspectives and experience of climate change as people of the land.



The theme of the gathering was '**working together with one heart and one mind**', with intentional listening and recognition that the knowledge held by Coast Salish relatives, accumulated over millennia of living in relationship with these lands and waters, is essential to meaningful collaboration on climate adaptation.

The Coastal Climate Resilience Collaborative (Collaborative) is a regional initiative convened by ICLEI Canada, with funding from Natural Resources Canada's Climate-Resilient Coastal Communities Program, working to advance long-term coastal resilience across the unceded Coast Salish territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, səlilwətaɬ, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, and shíshálh Nations in the south coast of British Columbia. Since late 2024, staff representatives from municipalities, regional districts and First Nation governments in this region, who are responsible for climate resilience initiatives, have been invited to work together.

The Collaborative meets virtually as well as in-person—learning about existing regional initiatives, discussing local climate resilience priorities, and developing a shared vision for the future. The work of the Collaborative is focused on coastal communities' climate resilience through solutions that promote public health and biodiversity. Our time together continues through to the end of 2027.

While every member of the Collaborative arrives carrying their own lived experiences, perspectives, and questions, our shared positionality is shaped by a humble recognition that this land is not merely a physical space but a living entity with its own spirit, one that carries the stories of countless generations before us and will do so for generations to come.

The Collaborative holds a responsibility to honour the history and wisdom of the land, while working alongside one another toward a more climate-resilient future for all beings who call this coast home.



Acknowledging that the root cause of climate change is linked to colonization and an extractive mindset, the Collaborative is strengthened by the guidance of First Nations' leadership on how to bring our communities into balance with natural law and cultivate a reciprocal relationship with the lands and waters that sustain us. The climate is changing. Mother Earth has adapted to change many times before. Mother Earth is now drawing our collective attention to an ongoing imbalance.

During the gathering, Coast Salish relatives shared stories, concerns, and hopes about the land and water across their territories. We listened with curiosity for what the land needs and how the water communicates, as essential elements for sustaining life for the human and non-human beings along the region. While this report reflects what was shared during the gathering on June 16, 2026, it is not intended to represent the views of all Nations, communities, or citizens in the region.

Gathering in Circle to Listen and Learn



The gathering took place on June 16, 2026 at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre on Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Territory, bringing together Coast Salish Knowledge Keepers, Youth, Elders, Matriarchs, 2SLGBTQ+ peoples, with the Collaborative community partners and advisory members, to sit in circle to encourage an open dialogue.

The day opened with a welcome song from Sempulyan Stewart Gonzales (Skwxwú7mesh/xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Nations), an explanation of the gathering's intentions and expectations by Katisha Paul. In an opening circle, participants were invited to introduce themselves and describe their role, followed by an overview of the Collaborative's work from Ainaz Bozorgzadeh, as well as highlighting examples of Indigenous Leadership on climate adaptation.

Knowledge Keepers told stories to honour the past, and shared syáθəs (teachings) from the water. In their words, there was acknowledgment of all our relations, and recounts of witnessing the present impacts of climate change on cultures, languages, protocols, and practices. They set expectations on how to move forward together with one heart and one mind.

We heard a presentation on the integral role of young Indigenous leaders in actioning climate adaptation strategies from Sunshine Dunstanmoore, Youth Representative with the BC Union of Indian Chiefs. New and existing relationships were nourished over lunch with a traditional Coast Salish meal of smoked salmon and rice, salad, cinnamon bannock, and sx̌ʷésəm (soap berry) juice.

The day closed with a giveaway of locally produced herbal tea of raspberry leaf, licorice root, mint, and rose hips, to help ground the circle in the sacred teachings that are derived from the land, and a vase decorated with Coast Salish orca, eagle, bear, and salmon designs, as a physical reminder of their guidance and our shared responsibility now carried forward.



Honouring the Past

What teachings does our water carry?

Nə̓c̓aʔmat tə šxʷqʷeləwən ct (we are of one heart and one mind). Beyond plans, strategies, and policies lies the recognition that there is no division of responsibilities. We are on a journey of re-learning to co-exist through rehabilitation, restoration, and regeneration, while giving təməxʷ (Earth) the space to heal, and adapting our relationship with her to honour reciprocity. Healing takes time: time to rebuild the land as people are rebuilt, time to heal, and time to come together to care for one another and places we share.

Healthy watersheds are inseparable from healthy communities and stories were shared of long-standing relationships with the land and water that continue to shape guardianship practices today. Teachings in the circle reflected on the impacts of water exploitation and development, including disappearing and polluted waterways, landslides, and restricted access to traditional places, which are affecting both ecosystems and the ability to practice intergenerational knowledge transfer.

“When the tide is out, dinner is served.”
Alec Dan (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Nation)

We witnessed vulnerability from the Knowledge Keepers as many shared stories of past abundances of seafood that can no longer be harvested because of water contamination, toxic runoffs, and noise pollution caused by increased tanker traffic. The stories, legends, protocols and teachings that were shared in the circle amplified First Nations peoples inherent right to be recognized as stewards, teachers, scientists, and subject matter experts as climate adaptation strategies are implemented.



Witnessing the Present

What climate change impacts are you witnessing throughout the territories?

As Knowledge Keepers walk along the water today, the skyline, mountains, and trees have seemingly altered the way they meet with the mouth of the rivers and the Salish Sea. Visible shifts have been seen in forest composition, along with the disappearance of relatives such as the deer, wolf, blue grouse and turkey. As Knowledge Keepers look to the Underwater people and the Salmon people for guidance, there was a shared understanding of the need to act now to protect the water for the future generations.

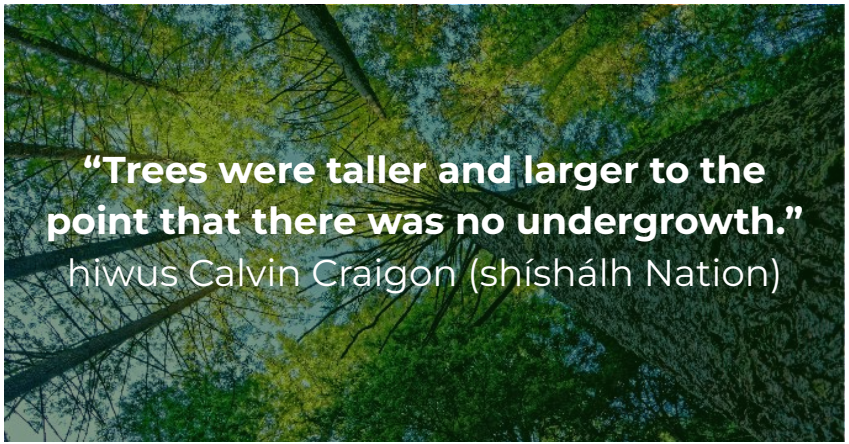
Marine health is a strong concern. The health of the water determines the health of the people in the same way that the health of the people determines the health of the water. For Coast Salish peoples, saltwater provides 99% of the traditional diet. With declining water quality making harvesting oysters, clams, eulachon, and salmon in the səlilw̓ət unsafe, there is a critical loss felt deeply by those raised on these teachings and practices.



“Red-tide is the səlilw̓ət (inlet) cleansing itself... and there are more and more red-tides now.”

Carleen Thomas, səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-waututh) Nation

The currents of the water are changing, so the ability to read currents is lost. Changes are also noted in huckleberry and salmon berry harvests, and in the size of crabs caught. Access to traditional medicine and the ability to share knowledge of medicinal plants has been impacted by forestry practices. Harvesting is not simply about gathering food, but about following protocols and teachings passed down through generations.



Adaptation plans have been written, yet stalled in translation, interpretation, and implementation. Experiences were shared of providing input on processes and not seeing it

carried through to plans and policies, as well as traditional placenames not being reflected due to reasons such as tensions around shared territories between Nations.

Youth in particular spoke to climate anxiety, not having the same access to foods their Elders grew up with, and worrying that their own children will not have access to the same places, traditions, and practices.

Stories were shared of the resilience in protecting the inherent rights of First Nations and the legal plurality that exists in revitalizing cultural practices within Coast Salish jurisdiction.

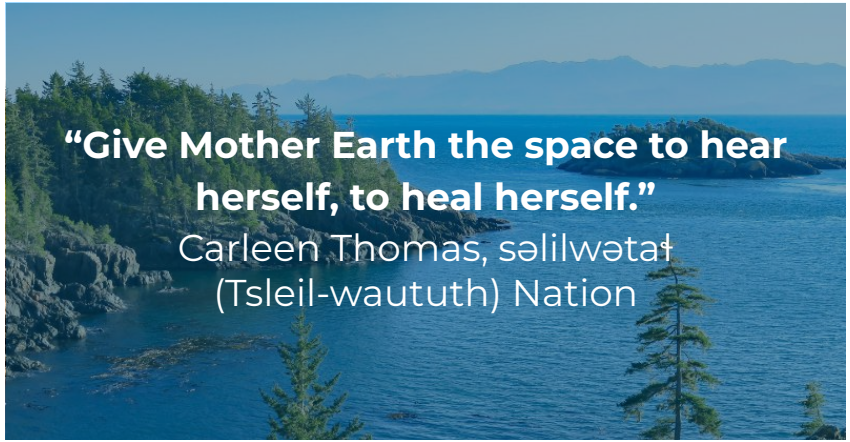
Moving Forward Together

How do we work together with one heart and one mind?

There is value in pausing to observe, and to take the time to build relationships. Implementation is stronger with cross-cultural, cross-regional collaboration, and when grounded in the laws derived from the land and water and the solutions Indigenous peoples are already naturally adapting with. Long term sustained funding needs to flow directly to First Nations to lead the work of climate adaptation, for the good of us all.

Candace Campo, shíshálh Knowledge Keeper and co-founder of Talaysay Tours, highlighted the importance of education to support learning Coast Salish protocols and ways of knowing, and to share responsibility for caring for these lands and waters.

Carleen Thomas shared a teaching of helping one another First Nations and settlers are here to stay and must get along so that everyone can action the collective responsibility to be the caretakers of the land.





Sierra Tasi Baker, drawing on her Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Kwakwaka’wakw, Tɬingit, and part Hungarian heritage, spoke about tapping into one's own cultural heritage as a good way into this work, drawing on cultural ways of hosting and healing.

Jasmine Baker, a Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw youth, shared learning about placement of hemlock bough in the waters of Átl’ḵa7tsem (Howe Sound) for herring roe harvest, and how the feeling of eating herring roe, that has returned after a long time, was healing to her body, her people and future generations.

It was reinforced that effective climate action will uplift Indigenous leadership, cultivate reciprocal relationships with nature, and maintain respect for water as the foundation of life.

Our Shared Responsibility

Since the gathering, Collaborative partners and representatives have shared that what stayed with them is a sense of responsibility to do more to involve youth in their work, and a shift in relating to water as a regenerative relative rather than an exacerbated threat from climate change. Thoughtful consideration is required to navigate projects on shared territory. There is a tension of balancing the need to build relationships over time with the urgency of acting on climate change and implementing climate adaptation.

Climate adaptation work is most impactful when led by Indigenous peoples, who are the original caretakers of the lands and waters. Current climate strategies exist at local, regional, and national levels that are written and led by Indigenous peoples and can be referenced and amplified to bring Indigenous ways of being and thinking to the forefront of climate action. Sustained funding is essential to develop and maintain long-term, trust-based relationships with Indigenous communities and meaningfully co-develop and implement climate resilience solutions.

The Collaborative is continuing to hold opportunities to build on conversations and relationships started during this Knowledge Keepers gathering, such as extending invitations to the Collaborative's quarterly meeting and funding support to attend Adaptation Canada 2026. We are currently actioning the shared teachings in the Collaborative's adaptation projects. For example, we are applying a Coast Salish Engagement Protocol developed by NEPENEK for the Collaborative to include First Nation title and rights holder engagement in projects.

We are committed to ongoing climate adaptation for the wellbeing of all our relations.

Appreciation

We express gratitude for the opportunity to come together, and the stories and knowledge that were generously shared by the people of the land. As the rivers shift their directions and the moon continues to push and pull on the ocean tides, we will be here to walk alongside Indigenous peoples with **ƛʷáɬƛʷəɬ šxʷqʷeləwən (strong heart and strong mind)**.

