

**Progress in Negotiating Land, Resources and Self-government Agreements**

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories made a commitment in its mandate to work to resolve outstanding land, resources and self-government agreements during the term of our government. I would like to update Members today on the work our government is doing to fulfill that commitment.

Concluding these agreements and bringing increased certainty to land and resource management in the Northwest Territories is one of the most important challenges facing the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. Over the last year, all parties have made renewed efforts to tackle the remaining challenges and finalize agreements. As a result, I am confident that the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly will see success in this area.

Last fall, negotiators completed a full draft of a self-government Agreement-in-Principle for the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Tulita. On May 16, 2017, negotiators for the parties initialled the Tulita self-government Agreement-in-Principle in Tulita. Work is now underway to arrange for the formal approval and signing of this self-government Agreement-in-Principle. Once signed and approved, negotiations toward concluding a Tulita Final self-government Agreement will begin.

Negotiators for the parties have also completed an initial full draft of a Gwich'in self-government Agreement-in-Principle. Negotiators will be meeting next week to address issues that arose in consultations and in internal reviews of the draft Agreement-in-Principle.

Mr. Speaker, negotiators for the parties have also completed a full draft of a self-government Agreement-in-Principle for the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Norman Wells. Each

party is currently reviewing the draft agreement and consultations with other potentially affected Aboriginal parties have begun.

I am also pleased to report that negotiators for the parties are working on the last few remaining issues to complete a full draft of an Inuvialuit self-government Final Agreement.

Self-government negotiations with the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Colville Lake are working on text of a self-government agreement, and the parties have struck a working group to deal with important land related matters in the community of Colville Lake. Similarly, self-government negotiations are underway and a community information session is scheduled in June to hear from the community and keep them informed on these self-government negotiations.

Final Agreement negotiations with the Acho Dene Koe First Nation of Fort Liard and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation have reached the point where key decisions on the central aspects involving settlement lands and land quantum and the approach to governance are before them. The GNWT looks forward to hearing from the Acho Dene Koe First Nation on how they wish to proceed following their recent Band Council elections.

Mr. Speaker, working with Canada, Minister Bennett and I appointed two Ministerial Special Representatives to provide us with independent advice on whether agreements with the Dehcho First Nations, the Akaitcho Dene First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation are possible and how to approach concluding such agreements.

Mr. Speaker, on April 5<sup>th</sup> Minister Bennett and I met in Ottawa with leaders from the Akaitcho Dene First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation to discuss the report of the MSR. These meetings went well, with all parties acknowledging the helpful advice contained in the report. With the parties having common ground on the approach to negotiations and generally supporting the Ministerial Special Representative's recommendations, Minister Bennett and I committed to providing revised offers to the

Akaiitcho Dene First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation.

I am pleased to advise Members that government negotiators tabled a revised offer to the Northwest Territory Métis Nation on May 24 and a revised offer to the Akaiitcho Dene First Nations yesterday. These revised offers were informed by the Ministerial Special Representative's recommendations and is flexible so that it can be aligned to meet the priorities of the parties.

Mr. Speaker, enhanced workplans are also being developed with the Akaiitcho Dene First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation to conclude a negotiator's drafts of an Akaiitcho Agreement-in-Principle and a Métis Final Agreement in the next 18 - 24 months.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to these enhanced workplans, government will also propose new approaches to negotiations, approaches that make use of facilitators to assist all parties in finding solutions to issues involving overlapping interests between the Akaiitcho Dene First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation.

Mr. Speaker, while I cannot go into specific details regarding the contents of the offers or what was discussed during negotiations because all parties have agreed to keep negotiating positions confidential, I can report that additional meetings and negotiations are being planned over the next few months to build a consensus among the parties on key elements each party need to conclude agreements.

Mr. Speaker, Minister Bennett and I also met with leaders from the Dehcho First Nations on April 5<sup>th</sup> to discuss the report of the Ministerial Special Representative appointed to review those negotiations. Following that meeting, Minister Bennett and I wrote to Dehcho leadership asking them to confirm basic principles that are already accepted at other tables: that negotiations are trilateral and that a Dehcho Final Agreement will include the Dehcho portion of the single integrated system of resource management in the Mackenzie Valley.

The GNWT respects that the Dehcho First Nations must come to their own conclusions on these important matters, which are fundamental aspects on how to approach negotiations. We continue to await the Dehcho's response and look forward to being able to get back to the table with them if we agree there is a path forward.

Once the Dehcho First Nations provides confirmation that there is common ground between the parties on these matters, Canada and the GNWT will provide the Dehcho First Nations with a revised offer shortly thereafter.

The certainty provided by final land claim and self-government agreements is central to the health of our communities, our economy and our environment. Concluding these agreements is an essential step towards providing certainty on how land in the NWT can be used for economic development, for conservation, for recreation and for traditional activities. The GNWT remains committed to doing its part to finalize land, resources and self-government agreements as quickly as possible in a manner that is fair, balanced and continue to promote workable and affordable agreements that respect Aboriginal rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.