

Celebrating Inuvialuit Day

Mr. Speaker, thirty-five years ago today, the Committee for Original People's Entitlement, or COPE, signed the Inuvialuit Final Agreement with the Government of Canada on behalf of the Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic. The Inuvialuit Final Agreement was the first comprehensive land claim agreement north of the 60th parallel and only the second of its kind in Canada. In many ways, this agreement led the way for the future negotiation of land, resources and self-government agreements in this territory and, perhaps, in Canada.

The IFA was negotiated to help preserve Inuvialuit cultural identity and values within a changing northern society and to enable Inuvialuit to be equal and meaningful participants in the northern and national economy and society. It was also intended to help protect and preserve the Arctic wildlife, environment and biological productivity.

Under the agreement, Inuvialuit received ownership of over 90,000 square kilometres of land, including almost 13,000 square kilometres of subsurface ownership. In addition to lands, the Inuvialuit received \$152 million in capital transfer payments from the Government of Canada. The IFA also provides the Inuvialuit with certain wildlife harvesting rights in the ISR, including the exclusive right to harvest game on Inuvialuit lands and the exclusive right to harvest furbearers.

Perhaps just as importantly, the IFA also gave Inuvialuit a guaranteed right to have a say in important decisions in the region. The agreement provided for the creation of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, established the Inuvialuit Game Council and ensured Inuvialuit participation on co-management boards, including the Fisheries Joint Management Committee, Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT), Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), Environmental Impact Screening Committee and Environmental Impact Review Board.

Economically, the IFA established the Inuvialuit Development Corporation to help ensure Inuvialuit had an adequate level of self-reliance and a solid economic base to allow them to participate fully in the northern Canadian economy.

Today, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation continues to be an important partner with the Government of the Northwest Territories in working on behalf of all residents. The IRC was the first Indigenous government to join with our government in signing on to the Devolution Agreement-in-Principle in January 2011, continuing their role as trend-setters for Indigenous rights in the Northwest Territories. Their support and participation in the negotiation of the final agreement was invaluable to our government, and they continue to be strong supporters and allies in its ongoing implementation.

Our government is currently engaged, along with the IRC, in negotiations with the Government of Canada on a co-management regime for offshore oil and gas resources. Negotiation of co-management is one of the remaining commitments under the Devolution Agreement and will help ensure that Northerners are able to both have a say in the development of these resources and to benefit from them economically.

The Inuvialuit have also joined us in the science-based review of the federal moratorium on oil and gas development in the Arctic Ocean. Together, we recognize the enormous economic potential of this untapped resource and we look forward to the day when our residents can benefit from its safe and responsible development.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are many events planned back home to mark today's anniversary. While we cannot be there to take part ourselves, I'd like to invite all Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating all Inuvialuit on this important anniversary, and I look forward to another 35 years and more of successful partnership between our governments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.