



Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations
#201 - 159 King St.
Peterborough, ON
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July 23, 2012

Dear MP/MPP,

The discussions around the Algonquin Land Claim, and negotiations toward an Agreement in Principle (AIP) by the three parties at the table is now coming to a critical phase, after a lack of progress on this file since the early 1990's.

The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) have been listed on the Committee of External Advisors on the land claim, and represent thousands of member families who live, work and recreate within the area of the land claim.

It was our understanding this CEA was intended by the provincial and federal governments as a forum for 'public consultation'. In practical terms, this forum has been less about consultation and more about vague generalities about the state of negotiations. True public consultation has yet to occur and we ask that in advance of the next meeting with the negotiators on July 26, 2012, we receive a schedule laying out how the two levels of government intend to broaden the consultation process to include the general public who may be directly affected by the outcome of negotiations.

We have been told that staff at the Ministry of Natural Resources, Aboriginal Affairs Negotiations Unit, has been working closely with affected municipalities on issues including land selection, taxation, development and others related issues. Others from MNR and MAA have been taking part in the 'consultation' meetings referred to above. To date, there has been a significant lack of fact-based discussion, and a lack of in-depth consultation on issues like land use planning, enforcement, fish and wildlife management plans, fair sharing, designated species, conflicting land claims and other issues.

We strongly believe that a thorough review of the potential impact of the claim on private landowners, fish and wildlife populations, the future conservation of land and water resources and the impact on local businesses and the economy should be a priority for both governments. These factors, along with the potential impact on the lives of all residents, on tourism, forestry and cottage associations argues for broader public consultation and transparency as part of the process BEFORE an AIP is signed. Landowner rights, fish and wildlife, forests, and Crown lands may be subject to considerable change as a result of the claim. There may be considerable land given over to the Algonquin as part of the settlement. What land parcels are involved? How will the land in question be used? What rules for development will apply? What impact will the land selection have on local residents, on cottagers, on resource-based tourist operators? What impact will the land selection process and related future management have on local lakes and watersheds? The answers to these and other questions remain to be answered to our satisfaction.

Suggestions by negotiators that the AIP will be general in nature, with twenty topical chapters, appear contrary to other AIPs across Canada which contain very specific levels of detail in them. It is important that the province and the federal government get it right the first time, not just for the sake of the Algonquin, but in the interests of the 1.4 million non-aboriginal residents within the land claim, who are depending on their local, provincial and federal governments to represent their interests.

Our members are your constituents. Waterfront property owners make up a significant portion of local property tax base, and support millions of dollars of economic activity in this region. As stewards of the resources on and around their private property, this group will be affected by changes to tenure on area lakes and rivers and are due the opportunity to learn about the proposed settlement terms, and to provide input in advance of any settlement.

It is critical that the views of local businesses, and the 1.4 million non-aboriginals who live within the claim area, are heard. It is important that the broader public has a vehicle through which they can ask questions, get answers and voice their concerns. It is important that an economic impact statement is prepared and that the rules for development are clear and it is important that we are given an understanding of how the results of the negotiations will impact on our valuable natural resources and access to those resources for all Ontarians.

We will continue to press for a more comprehensive consultation process around the land claim process that will address the issues outlined above and that will provide the general public with an opportunity to be fully informed in advance of a landmark agreement that may significantly impact on their daily lives. On behalf of the residents and businesses in your municipality we respectfully ask that you join us in demanding that the public's voice be heard.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Rees, Executive Director
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