



Yellowknives Dene First Nation

P.O. Box 2514

Yellowknife, NT X1A 2P8

Dettah

Telephone: (867) 873-4307

Facsimile: (867) 873-5969

Ndilo

Telephone: (867) 873-8951

Facsimile: (867) 873-8545

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Press Release

Yellowknives Dene First Nation retract support for the Slave Geological Province Corridor until the GNWT takes the action necessary to ensure that Northerners benefit from the project

Year after year, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation watch as the Government of the Northwest Territories allow opportunities to develop Northern workforces and strengthen Northern business slip through their fingers.

The GNWT accumulates debt at an alarming rate under the guise of investment that will allow our Territory to grow stronger. The result of their spending is that Northern businesses are getting weaker, and skills development opportunities are being missed.

Antiquated methods of procurement and Indigenous engagement continue to hold our economy back; consequently, we can no longer remain silent as our Territory slips further into decline.

In 2019 the GNWT presented the Yellowknives Dene First Nation First Nation with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the advancement of the Slave Geological Providence Corridor (SGPC). After careful consideration and discussion, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation Chief and Council approved a Band Council Resolution allowing the Chiefs to sign the MOU on behalf of the community. This gave us hope the GNWT was taking the steps necessary to ensure that we would be in a position to help shape the project in a manner that would benefit the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and Northerners alike.

Section 3 of the MOU gave us a distinct sense of optimism that the GNWT's previous ways of doing business were changing and that they were pursuing a collaborative approach that would consider Indigenous people's input and insight. Section 3 outlined the concept of a Steering Team as well as a Working Group, each comprised of representatives from both the GNWT and YKDFN.

Based on our MOU discussions, we supported the GNWT's request to the Federal Government for funding (letter issued on May 1st, 2019). We believed that the Yellowknives Dene First Nation would have input on how this project would eventually take shape.

Both Chiefs signed this MOU on August 13th, 2019, as of today it remains unsigned by the GNWT.

Meanwhile, the GNWT has issued multiple contracts related to this project. The most significant of these contracts was a Standing Offer Agreement (SOA), which was recently awarded to two large multi-national consulting firms. The scope of this work is to perform the Environmental, Community Consultation, and Engineering work necessary to complete the Environmental Impact Assessment and regulatory authorizations required to begin the construction phase of SGPC.

The value of work packages to be issued under the SOA amount to \$ 20,000,000 over 4-6 years. This SOA was awarded based upon responses to an RFP that was developed with absolutely no input from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation First Nation. The MOU discussions we had with the GNWT led us to believe that we would have a seat at the table when deciding what Environmental and Social considerations were important when executing a project of this significance.

Given the opportunity, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation would have advocated that a higher degree of importance being put on capacity building, benefits for Northern and Indigenous business, local hiring, and community engagement. Ultimately RFPs were issued, and the proposals were evaluated on criteria important to the GNWT with no regard for what is essential to the YKDFN or the people of the North.

As a result of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation support, the Federal Government announced \$30,000,000 in funding to advance the SGPC project in August 2019. The YKDFN letter of support was given based on the premise that we would be able to have input on how that money was best utilized through working groups and steering groups. We now know that our support for the GNWT's funding request was provided under false pretenses.

Det' on Cho Environmental (a Yellowknives Dene First Nation Company) was unsuccessful in their bid to provide services under the SOA. While we recognize the qualifications of the two successful bidders, both multi-national firms, we also are aware that these companies were deemed to be most qualified through a lens that did not benefit from Yellowknives Dene First Nation input. We are confident that if RFP requirements were developed based upon input from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Det' on Cho Environmental (and their partners Hemmera and Dillon Consulting) would have demonstrated that they were best suited to advance this project.

Unfortunately, because Det' on Cho Environmental developed an approach that included and gave weight to items of importance to Northerners and Indigenous people, our bid fell short (third of five submissions).

While we are frustrated that the GNWT's procurement policies don't provide any provisions supporting Indigenous Procurement and that rules supporting Northern businesses are outdated and inadequate, we are infuriated that the profits related to this work will flow outside of the NWT because the GNWT deceived us.

In her bid to be Premier, Caroline Cochrane responded to a question put forward from the MLA's regarding working with Indigenous Governments. In her response, Ms. Cochrane stated that when dealing with Indigenous governments;

"It has to be a win-win situation here. It can't be the GNWT making the direction."

Ms. Cochrane later followed with an answer to the question of why she was seeking the office of Premier;

"I believe the reason that I am here is because we can do better"

In our opinion, the GNWT's 19th Assembly is not generating win-win opportunities and certainly not doing any better than their predecessors.

Progress was made towards Government-to-Government collaboration through the drafting of the MOU, which took place under the 18th Legislative Assembly. Inaction on the execution of this agreement is the responsibility of the 19th Assembly. Despite the promise of positive change pre-election, the reality is that the 19th Assembly has regressed.

The GNWT's continued justification for pumping millions of dollars out of the Territory is that the Territorial Government needs to ensure it is getting "value for money". The GNWT's quest to achieve this value has resulted in a "penny wise, pound foolish" perspective that does not adequately take into account the high cost of being based in the North and gives zero credence to an approach that would develop our people and strengthen our communities.

We struggle with the GNWT's incessant "value for dollar" reprise. Bottom line, when Northern Businesses are forced to work within the constraints of an economic cost structure driven by a bloated, highly paid Territorial bureaucracy, it is difficult to compete with southern-based companies.

In light of the GNWT's questionable approach to engagement and disregard for supporting Northern Business, we are withdrawing our support for the Slave Geological Corridor Project. Our support for major infrastructure projects will not be forthcoming until the current GNWT procurement policies are reviewed, and changes are enacted that ensure the GNWT is serious about supporting Northern and Indigenous businesses.

It is a fact that dollars spent with Northern and Indigenous businesses have a significant multiplier effect on NWT's economy. The profits are not used to payout faceless investors; the profits build homes, roads, improve infrastructure, and support critical services like community wellness, daycare, and education.

In short, dollars spent with Northern and Indigenous businesses fuel economies and benefit Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people alike.

Our collective economic futures are in jeopardy, the economy of the Northwest Territories is in decline with no magic fix on the horizon. The Yellowknives Dene First Nation feel a sense of urgency that is motivating us to take material action to diversify and grow our business interests. The actions of the GNWT detract from our efforts and paralyze growth prospects for Indigenous people, Northern businesses, and the Territory at large. Either current attitudes and policies must change, or the people leading our Territory must change, there is no other alternative.

Sincerely,



Chief Edward Sangris



Chief Ernest Betsina

cc:

Jason Snaggs P.Eng., MBA

CEO, Yellowknives Dene First Nation First Nation