



ATLANTIC POLICY CONGRESS
OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS SECRETARIAT

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Executive Summary There is a great need for the government of Canada to invest in First Nations communities and people to ensure their full contribution and benefit to the economic future of the country. First Nations in Atlantic Canada require innovative partnership based programming and funding to support the continued growth of First Nation participation in the Atlantic Fishery to ensure long term sustainability. Direct investments in First Nations core programming for basic services need to be enhanced at fixed level over a ten year period to empower and support economic self-reliance and independence so basic public services equity is achieved and conditions of First Nations improve to parity of all other Canadians.

Proposals To Unlock First Nation Potential

The future of the Canadian economy and the economy of Atlantic Canada are tied to the essential role our First Nation people who contribute and support development of the economy and help rebuild our communities based on its strengths toward a better future. Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat is a policy research organization that analyzes and develops culturally relevant alternatives to federal policies that impact Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Innu communities and people and represents 38 First Nations of Atlantic Canada and Gaspé in Quebec.

Education and Economic Development - Both education and economic development continue to be a critical lifeline of our young people and is a foundation of who we are and who we will become in the near future as proud Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy & Innu peoples. As the private sector and governments search for human resources, our communities and people can provide a highly skilled and educated supply of people which can help meet the needs for all sectors of the economy. The focus and development of the communities is to establish strong values and beliefs which can move from dependency to action and mobilization. These actions start before children enter the school system and must be supported at the earliest stages of development in the community to allow parents and families to develop the human potential a full capacity of each child. Children are the future of all the communities and a healthy start is of paramount importance. Learning must be grounded in our values, traditions and languages to ensure the children who grow into youth and adults become contributors to our societies and improvements for our people. These improvements will ensure the expertise contributes to society and the overall economy of each of our communities and the region as a whole including the regional economy.

The value of education and the results produced through skilled and educated people can really assist and support all aspects of our communities to accelerate the pace of progress and improve conditions in our entire communities move toward economic equity. As incremental improvements in school retention and higher performance outcomes in education play out in

junior and high school, these people will move forward to become leaders in the economy and job markets. The greater the pools of skilled and educated people, it is expected to improve other health and social outcomes.

Atlantic Economic Participation & Inclusion - The development of strong positive relationships with provinces and the general non-native private sector players across the region are critical if we, as First Nations, are to unleash the economic potential of our youth population. The need to build strong partnerships and outcome based actions are key to address this growing population. The demands of the young continue to grow as opportunities emerge throughout the Atlantic region. These young educated people must be provided the tools, skills and access to real opportunities. This must be accomplished through proactive focused actions with one sector and one company at a time to ensure our youth make the successful migration from a First Nations to the various key urban centers across the Atlantic region. A partnership focus must ensure First Nation youth connect and stay with training and or employment opportunities requires and complete collaborative effort of governments at all levels, employers, First Nations and all aboriginal employment and support agencies. The supply of Aboriginal Youth labour must be linked with real opportunities within and beyond the First Nation communities. Making the transition and providing solid supports will be critical if young people and their families wish to stay in the urban settings and not be drawn back to the First Nations community after the first crisis. Capacity, supports, survival skills and essential life skills are key for survival beyond one year so as to ensure that jobs turn into careers.

Many of these life skills are acquired by university and community college students who make the transition to the cities but it requires ongoing attention and appropriate supports and mentoring for them to stay and build a life and career in the city after training and education as in many cases that is where the Atlantic economic opportunities exist. The Urban Aboriginal Strategy needs focus in the Atlantic region to ensure opportunities match needs. A good example of mega projects which can help create opportunities and employment is the potential Lower Churchill Falls in Newfoundland & Labrador as well as the Federal shipbuilding contract proposal in Halifax. The many jobs and careers which could be produced by such large projects create sustainable jobs for 30 to 40 years. These could be ideal for First Nations people and strategies must be developed now not later to ensure the people get connected to the opportunities. The experience and expertise developed through the Sydney Tar Ponds project provided innovative approaches to create real jobs and business opportunities for First Nations. This effort also applies to the Lower Churchill Falls project and many other large projects planned for Atlantic Canada. First Nations youth need to be part of the equation so that they are trained well in advance of the start and implementation of the projects. The experiences and expertise developed in Cape Breton through the Unamaki Benefits Office involving the five First Nations in Cape Breton needs to be reproduced in each of the major urban centres across the Atlantic region to ensure the linkages are made between industry demands and the untapped supply of First Nation labour.

The need to integrate actions to real outcomes which produce long term sustainable jobs is essential for the youth who wish to stay and adjust and for the city to become a new home away from the First Nation. Today, for numerous communities the focus for many is solely on reserve to build an economy, but there is a growing need to focus on the needs of the off reserve population as well as those willing to migrate to secure an opportunity which leads to long term employment. Employers and governments need to look in their own backyard to find the skilled First Nation people to fill the large quantity of skill and labour shortages which will grow over the next decade.

First Nation Fishery - Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat has completed a great deal of work with all First Nations and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans over the past number of years as communities work to develop governance and business capacity in the development of each of their First Nation community communal fishery. APC, in partnership with Ulnuweg, Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has undertaken an innovative approach to build and strengthen First Nations level capacity and expertise. In particular, through the collaborative efforts of the Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative (AICFI) real improvements have been made in each community to strengthen capacity and results. The Marshall 1999 SCC Decision which recognized our Treaty Rights was an important starting point for the full participation and inclusion of all our First Nations in the full spectrum of the Atlantic fishery. Today, many of the First Nations involved produce considerable employment and revenues which support economic and social development in each of our communities. To sustain such important efforts, it is paramount to develop a business approach to this work and have clear demonstrated business performance indicators which clearly show progress and results in each and every community.

Through the development of an innovative collaborative approach between APC and DFO as well as the operation of a Business Development Team, we have been able to focus efforts on the items which are most important to the communities, like total First Nations control of all aspects of the fishery, defined mentoring & training, business plan development, strong governance and tracking of performance for First Nations through a Fisheries Management System (FMS), Business Development Team (BDT) and other staff at APC to focus to support the communities in their efforts. This combined with the announcement of the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Strategic Partnership Initiative last year has helped First Nations to gradually move beyond just harvesting and to become more diversified in their activities in the Atlantic fishery. The new efforts create new lines of activity and additional jobs as well as increased revenues for the First Nations. The August 2010 announcement and implementation of the Atlantic Commercial Fisheries Diversification Initiative by DIAND now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern development has created new synergy and collaborative efforts based on emerging business opportunities for our communities. This effort is in line with the new Aboriginal Economic Development Framework which is intended to focus government and builds key strong collaborative linkages to support economic results and outcomes at the First Nations level.

Health Services

In the area of health, there are a number of key issues and concerns which face the First Nations based on the small size of the Health Canada Atlantic FNIHB region and the need to work with consistently all four Atlantic provinces. Key actions must be placed by Health Canada to ensure the alignment of First Nation priorities with the work going on in each of the provinces.

Funding Sustainability: Atlantic Canada is unique because 75% of our First Nations communities are 'Transfer' communities, meaning that they have a significant degree of influence over health funding and how it is utilized in the community. However, the current funding cap on transfer payments to communities (3%), particularly smaller communities, presents significant problems. The approach to funding and the formula basis used for First Nations communities must be revised based on a common standard to reflect current needs and a range of comparable programming & services for all First Nations in the region not solely based on population. Funding based on comprehensive First Nation health plans and strategies is required to connect funding to outcomes and results. Strong evidenced based accountability at the community level is essential for all our First Nation communities.

Mental Health and Addictions: Mental Health and Addictions continue to be a key issue in Atlantic First Nations Communities. Mental health programming is almost non-existent and requires dedicated funding allocation for the Atlantic region based on the detail strategy developed in collaboration with the First Nations in the region. Addictions issues are moving from solely addictions based on alcohol consumption to include other more complex addictions to illicit and prescriptions drug abuse.

Prescription Drug Abuse: In recent years the prevalence of prescription drug abuse in Atlantic First Nations communities has been on the rise and has required focused action and collaboration. Traditional addictions such as alcohol are still serious issues; however, more attention needs to be paid to the misuse and abuse of prescribed drugs such as opioids and benzodiazepines (Benzos). This requires a fully integrated collaborative region wide approach to address all aspects of the problem and to address issues effectively.

Children and Youth: Services dedicated to Children and Youth living in First Nations communities needs to improve and continues to face significant challenges. The youth need positive programming to ensure that they grow into healthy well-adjusted adults and do not face serious challenges of addiction or suicide based on a total lack of hope. Programming, services and supports must empower the young people. Presently, there are serious gaps in youth programming at the community level.

Evidence Based Programming in First Nations Communities: Merging community annual reporting based on the funding agreement and accountability requirements with the collection of key relevant health status data in a paper-based or web based format will alleviate the current activity reporting burden on communities while at the same time allowing for the collection of relevant health status data to enable communities themselves to make more evidence based decisions for community health planning and services to address needs. Strong evidence based accountability at the community level is key.

Housing & Infrastructure

The growing First Nation populations have had increasing demands for the housing and Infrastructure. There needs to be additional direct investments in additional housing for all the First Nations to address the growing backlog of units and needs. In the Atlantic region, at least 3000 new units are needed to address the backlog and growing families in all the communities. The current fixed budgets at CMHC and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development will take decades to address the needs which exist today. An investment of new funds is needed to provide much needed housing to the First Nations in the region as well as the rest of Canada.

In the area of First Nation Infrastructure, the recently completed National Engineering Assessment provides evidence on the poor and urgent situation which exists on First Nations communities. The report provides a solid starting point to develop a long term plan and solution for this issue. The current situation of the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AANDC) long term capital plan with existing resource levels will take at least 300 years to address all the needs identified. This situation is not acceptable and massive investments are needed to address this infrastructure crisis in First Nations. The situation puts people and families at serious risk where community systems are not working properly and are in urgent need for upgrades and improvements. The development of standards and an appropriate regulatory regime is paramount to ensure the situation get addressed in all the communities.

The needs to protect source water, water and waste water is a very important priority of the Chiefs and wish to work collaboratively with the federal government to address this issue in the next few years as a regime emerges. Any regime must address all short and long term costs and the critical importance of First Nation capacity to have a regime which works and that is equal to the level of quality and services and standards which exist in all non-native communities in the country.

Recommendations & Investment Requirements

- The immediate renewal of funding of 10 million per year for a 5 year extension of the DFO Atlantic Integrated Commercial Fisheries Initiative.
- Establishment of a set cost/price escalator for all First Nation funding of all basic programs as education, infrastructure/housing, social, health and essential services to be provided for the next decade at base rate of 10 percent per year to address needs for basic service equity to similar services provided to all Canadians.
- Provide additional investments of at least 10 million per year to support the First Nation transition to jobs and training opportunities in Major Atlantic Centre's and critical economic sectors in Atlantic Canada.