

July 31, 2012

AN OPEN LETTER TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND
MEMBERS OF THE ONTARIO LEGISLATURE IN EASTERN ONTARIO

Dear MP/MPP:

As you know, the discussions around the Algonquin Land Claim, and negotiations toward an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) by the three parties at the table has been accelerated over the last two or three years, after a lack of progress on this file since the early 1990's.

The groups listed below sit on the Committee of External Advisors for the land claim, and represent tens of thousands of members who live, work and recreate within the area of the land claim. We have recently been involved in what the provincial and federal governments are referring to as "public consultations." In our view, these meetings are less about consultation and more about the province providing us with vague generalities about the state of negotiations. True public consultation has yet to occur and we had asked in advance of our meeting with the negotiators on July 26, 2012, for 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. This information was not presented, and no commitment was made as to when the information might be expected.

We have been told repeatedly that staff at the Ministry of Natural Resources' Aboriginal Affairs Negotiations Unit, have been working closely with affected municipalities on issues including land selection, taxation, development and other related issues. Others from the MNR and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs (MAA) have been taking part in the "consultation" meetings referred to above. To date, there has been an appalling lack of fact-based discussion, and a lack of in-depth consultation on issues such as enforcement, harvesting, 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 fish and wildlife populations, the future conservation of those resources and the impact on local businesses, private lands and the economy should be a priority for both governments. These factors, along with the potential impact on the lives of your residents, on anglers, hunters, tourism, hunt camps, forestry and cottage associations argues for broader public consultation and transparency as part of the process BEFORE an AIP is signed. Parks, fish and wildlife, forests, and Crown lands may be subject to considerable change as a result of the claim. Access to Crown land and trails may also be affected. There will 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 hunt camps, outfitters and resource-based tourist operators? What impact will the land selection process have on local lakes and watersheds? The answers to these and many other questions remain to be answered to our satisfaction.

Suggestions by negotiators that the AIP will be general in nature, with twenty topical chapters, are questionable in light of other AIP's across the country 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 nonaboriginal residents within the land claim, who are depending on their local, provincial and federal governments to represent their interests at the table.

Our members and customers are your constituents. Recreational fishing and hunting generates over \$2.5 billion in annual economic activity in Ontario, and the license revenue from the almost 1.5 million anglers and hunters pays for two-thirds of all fish and wildlife programs in the province through the Special Purpose Account (SPA). In the area of the claim, fishing alone supports over 8,000 jobs and generates \$699 million in annual business. Hotels, tourist outfitters, gas stations, restaurants, and other retail establishments in eastern Ontario benefit significantly from recreational fishing and hunting.

It is critical that both levels of government provide the public with a comprehensive understanding of their respective positions on all aspects of the AIP, and create a forum to hear the views of the 1.4 million nonaboriginals who live within the claim area BEFORE the AIP is signed. This process is essential in order to avoid creating injustices, and to ensure that the broader public has a vehicle through which they can ask questions, get answers and voice their concerns before it is too late. 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 all of your constituents, we respectfully ask that you join us in demanding that the public's voice be heard.

Yours sincerely,

Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association
Canadian Shooting Sports Association
Canadian Sporting Arms and Ammunition Association
Conservationists of Lennox and Addington
Delta Waterfowl
Friends of Fur
Land O' Lakes Tourist Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs
Ontario Fur Managers Federation
Ontario Hunt Camps Association
Ontario Trails Council
Ottawa Valley Tourist Association
Safari Club International - Canada