

## UNEDITED SUMMARY REPORT ON ROYAL COMMISSION HEARINGS

PREPARED BY: Greg Martin  
DIAND  
DATE: 17-06-92  
Starting Time: 9:00 a.m.  
Adjournment Time: 5:00 p.m.  
LOCATION: Sheshatshiu, Labrador.  
Peenamain McKenzie School

## WITNESS:

1. Sylvester Andrew-School Worker(Shesht)
2. Apenam Pone-Director Drug and Alcohol Program(Shesht)
3. Chief Kathie Rich (Davis Inlet)
4. George Rich-Executive Director, Innu Nation-Councillor, Davis Inlet
5. Simon Michel-Indiv. Presentation
6. Ben Michel-Indiv. Presentation
7. Kirk Lethbridge-Labrador Metis Association(LMA)
8. Elizabeth Penashue-Innu Elder
9. Jack Penashue-Indiv. Presentation
10. David Nuke-Indiv. Presentation
11. Jean Pierre Ashini-Innu Hunter
12. Mary Anne Michel-Innu Elder
13. Peter Penashue-President of the Innu Nation
14. Simco Rich-Innu Elder(Shesht)
15. Patrick Rich-Indiv. Presentation

## COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

1. Rene Dussault
2. Mary Sillet
3. Viola Robinson
4. Chief Francis Penashue (Shesht) Commissioner of the day

## SUMMARY:

Presentations were made by Innu youth, Political leaders, community workers and Elders. Issues covered included; the current socio-economic conditions and associated problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, and family violence; Land Claims, Self-Government, low-level flying hunting and fishing rights, inequity of access to federal programs, direct funding from the federal government, the lack of control Innu have over decisions about their own lives; the Davis Inlet Situation.

## REPORT: (By Witness)

Sylvester Andrew-School Worker(10:20-10:35)

Talked about Innu life before European settlement as told and passed on by his forefathers when Labrador was a true hunting and fishing country. Spoke to flooding of Innu graves to build Churchill Falls. Felt that Innu lost much

with this development yet received no benefits. Stated that Innu never gave up title to their land and are acting to stop destructive practices. Spoke to racism in Goose Bay and negative impacts of school on language and culture. Called for Self-Government and release from federal and provincial authority.

Apenam Pone-Director Drug and Alcohol Rehab Program(10:50-11:05)

Talked about drug and alcohol problems among the Innu of Sheshatshiu and linked them to a lack of control over education, social conditions and religion. Feels problems will remain until Innu take control over and responsibility for their own lives. Would like to see a mobile treatment center established in the country. Stressed importance of the teachings of Elders and need to teach culture to youth. Concerned with funding available to deal with these problems.

Chief Kathi Rich -Davis Inlet (11:06-11:25)

Spoke about the tragic fire in her community Feb. 14, 1992 and how it has finally brought the community together. Related Minister Siddon's refusal to conduct public inquiry and advised that community, with help of Innu Nation, has done one. Reports they are determined to move the community from the existing site. Tabled the report entitled Gathering Voices. Spoke to Drug and alcohol abuse, deaths related to substance abuse and problem of gas sniffing among youth. Compared living in the community to living on a garbage dump. Feels control over the lives of Innu by the church, police and social services has had a devastating effect and must be given back to the Innu People. Asked RCAP to issue an interim report in response to their inquiry.

George Rich- Executive Director, Innu Nation (11:26-11:42)

Concerned that RCAP will not report for two years while specific issues for the Innu require immediate attention. Called for school repairs and a drug and alcohol treatment center based in traditional Innu country. Spoke of inability to access funding and programs available to other aboriginal groups and problem of Youth sniffing glue. Stressed need for a community policing program.

Simon Michel-Indiv. Presentation (11:44-11:50)

Concerned that low-level flying is destroying wild life and polluting the land. Critical of government treatment of Innu as unfair. Stressed importance of land and resources to Innu and impacts of hydro and lumber industry on Innu land.

Ben Michel-Indiv. Presentation (11:51-12:25)

Spoke about social collapse of the Innu People. Gave a history of Sheshatshiu and the various attempts at assimilation. Feels that colonial attitude has oppressed native peoples and has had a negative effect. Asked RCAP to report violations against Innu to Human Rights Commission. Spoke to importance of nation to nation relations as Innu people were never conquered and they must seek resolution from the United Nations. Linked social problems to dispossession of Land. Stated that Innu want respect and colonial actions will always lead to social disorder.

Kirk Lethbridge-Labrador Metis Association (1:55-2:00)

Demanded Aboriginals be given control over their own lives. Suggests Elders be brought into leadership role. Talked about current status of LMA as wanting to work with other aboriginal groups. Supports self- government, territorial status for Labrador and education funding for Metis.

Elizabeth Penashue-Innu Elder (2:02-2:30)

Described Innu occupation of their land for hundreds of years yet government dammed rivers and cut down trees without asking the Innu People. Feels land is for hunting and fishing not low-level flying and if it was not harmful it would not have been transferred to Labrador. Said that government is unable to experience destruction to land and wildlife as they don't live off the land. Spoke to how Innu People were jailed for occupying their own land and how Wild life enforcement officers are preventing Innu from living their life in the bush. Blames forced change of life style for driving Innu to drugs and alcohol.

Jack Penashue-Innu Youth (2:31-2:15)

Concerned with effect of education on Innu culture. Feels youth are taught that the Innu way is not the best way and how this causes confusion in their early teens with cultural identity. Linked this to dropping out of school and problems with drugs and alcohol. Described how parents knew nothing about the school system and could not help their children. Suggests that language and culture be part of the curriculum and called for more personal counselling. Feels teachers should be given an opportunity to study the Innu culture.

David Nuke-Indiv. Presentation(2:15-2:55)

Worried that Justice system has failed the Innu People. Would like to have tripartite discussions to look at modifying the system. Spoke of his own incarceration and the effect it had on him. Sees Innu being sent to prison for

minor crimes that could be dealt with by Elders in the community and save the government thousands of dollars. Said one doesn't culture in prison: just crime.

Jean Pierre Ashini-Innu Hunter (2:56-3:04)

Talked about the impact of low-level flying on wild life, children and Elders. Said that 9 jets flying 15ft from the ground 17 times per hour is frightening when you are in the bush. Described noise as unbearable making it impossible to hunt. Sees that caribou are thinner and partridges more scarce.

Mary Anne Michel-Innu Elder (3:05-3:15)

Described nomadic way of life before government interference. Feels Innu are treated badly and distressed with such poverty in their own land. Spoke to inadequacy of social assistance. Compared life in the country where nobody was sick to the community where everybody is sick.

Peter Penashue-President of the Innu Nation(3:40-4:18)

Concerned that since Canada came to the Innu, a once self-reliant people have become totally dependant and lost control over their land and people. Related that Innu were bounced between Quebec and NFLD, finally resting with NFLD without consultation. Feels federal government has not assumed its constitutional responsibility for the Innu and advised that Innu Nation is researching activities that have taken place between Ottawa and the Province of NFLD since confederation with respect to the Innu. Called for direct funding from the federal government as current federal provincial agreement system is not working; NFLD has too much control. Sees Davis Inlet re-settlement as a priority. Spoke to framework negotiations with federal and provincial governments on land claims and difficulties of process which has been suspended because the federal and provincial government can't agree on cost sharing. Feels Commission should look at the land claims policy; the process is too long. Supports self-government within the current process but aware that some of his people do not agree with him. Addressed the many social problems caused by the transition from the country to the communities and how in spite of the Sparrow decision provincial wild life officers are still preventing them from hunting a variety of animals they traditionally hunted. Socio-economic problems of the Innu will only be solved when they assume control over and responsibility for their own lives. He asked the Commission to release an interim report on a complaint filed with the Human Rights Commission regarding discrimination suffered by the Innu due to unequal access to programs through direct federal funding for the Innu.

Simco Rich-Innu Elder (4:20-4:40)

Described how Wild Life Officers are preventing Innu from hunting. Recommended Innu youth be taught traditional skills by Elders and that Innu be compensated for land flooded to build Churchill Falls. Called for control over their own lives and power to run their own programs.

Patrick Rich-Indiv. Presentation(4:41-4:55)

Related customary adoption practices and introduction of social service involvement in adoption. Made a moving presentation recounting his 19 year struggle with the province of Nfld to get back a child that was adopted without consent. Asked the Commission to put pressure on the provincial government to investigate the case.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS TABLED:

1. Presentation by Apenam Pone
2. Davis Inlet Public Inquiry-Gathering Voices-Kathie Rich
3. Presentation by Ben Michel
4. Presentation by Peter Penashue