

Meeting Note
September 21, 2004
11:00 a.m.

Attendees: Hon. T. Marshall, Minister of Justice
Hon. T. Rideout, Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs
Mr. Sean Dutton, Deputy Minister, Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs
Ms. Lynn Vivian-Book, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health and Community Services
Ms. Sheree MacDonald, Assistant Secretary, Social Policy Committee, Cabinet Secretariat

Purpose of Meeting:

- This meeting was set to discuss the continuing social challenges in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish and explore what could be done to address the challenges.

Background:

- Sheshatshiu (which is not yet a Reserve) remains a divided community since the narrow election victory by Chief Anastasia Qupee over former Chief Paul Rich in May 2004. Mr. Rich and his supporters have not accepted the results of the vote and Mr. Rich may still seek to have the result thrown out by the courts.
- Chief Qupee has been attempting to deal with fiscal challenges in the community, bringing greater scrutiny to the manner in which the previous Chief and Council managed the Band. This has proven difficult because many Band records were either destroyed in the March 2004 riot or have reportedly been taken by supporters of the former Chief.
- The Innu Nation has its election on October 6, 2004. Peter Penashue has yet to declare whether he will re-offer. Both Band Chiefs have expressed a lack of confidence in his leadership.
- The election dispute in Sheshatshiu is beyond the Province's capacity to resolve. INAC has recognized Ms. Qupee as the Chief, and will continue to do so unless the courts direct that a new election be held. Mr. Rich is unlikely to accept any compromise other than reinstallation as Chief. While a request was made by Mr. Penashue to have someone mediate the dispute, in this polarized environment, solutions are unlikely to come from anywhere but within the community. On a positive note, 25 people from Sheshatshiu recently took part in a healing and forgiveness retreat arranged by the Roman Catholic Church to try to resolve their problems.
- Chief Qupee has had a number of meetings with provincial politicians in recent months, and has formally requested support in a number of different areas:
 - **Crisis/trauma team for youth and adults** - an interagency team has been formed involving Health Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Health Labrador Corporation (HLC), Labrador School Board, Health and Community Services (HCS), Victims' Services, and Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. Kathleen Gorman of Family Justice Services Central in Grand Falls-Windsor has been identified as a facilitator acceptable to the Band. The Band has suggested the team wait until after the Innu Nation election before going into the community.
 - **Financial assistance** - the Band is experiencing cash flow problems as a result of the debts incurred by the previous council. The Band is seeking the release of withheld funding from HCS for the Shushepishipan Group Home, totalling about \$900,000. The Band would

welcome receipt of even a portion of these funds in the interim while it attempts to prepare the necessary audit for HCS. The Band is also seeking capital funding from INAC, which is being withheld pending receipt of outstanding reports on spending in the previous two fiscal years. The Band has also applied to INAC for \$400,000 for funding to develop leadership and management capacity and to implement cultural initiatives. Reporting is proving difficult for the Band given the state of the records and their difficulty finding a secure place in which to work.

- **Additional policing resources** - a Special Warrant has been approved to deploy seven more RCMP officers in Labrador. A First Nations Policing Agreement for Sheshatshiu, which would generate provincial savings that could be reinvested into Justice programming in the community, will be pursued this Fall.
 - **Investigative assistance** - The Band is seeking an RCMP investigation into the financial dealings of the previous Council. The RCMP has met with the Band, and it is our understanding that the Band will turn over the necessary information to the police to investigate.
 - **Recreation programming support** - since 2000, Tourism, Culture and Recreation (TCR) has been funding three recreation coordinators in Sheshatshiu. The Band has requested additional technical support and guidance for these staff. TCR has designated a staff person to help the Band create a yearly recreation plan.
 - **Temporary office space for Band staff** (five financial, two legal) - Transportation and Works has identified potential space at the College of the North Atlantic learning centre in Northwest River, and is evaluating options in Happy Valley-Goose Bay for the Band counsel and assistant.
- In the meantime, the attention being paid to Sheshatshiu has likely contributed to increased efforts by Natuashish (which is a Reserve) to raise the profile of issues in their community. These include their desire for a safe house, a Catholic church, a treatment centre (there is one in Sheshatshiu, reportedly with no waiting list) and a community centre, as well as more social workers (there are only two, with high caseloads). Infrastructure on Reserve is a federal responsibility.
 - There have been calls for an emergency mental health team to visit Natuashish; reports of gas-sniffing by underage youth have been made to the Child and Youth Advocate, and are being investigated by HLC. The issue in Natuashish (and Sheshatshiu) with regards to mental health services is not so much their availability but their lack of coordination and effectiveness. HLC, Health Canada and the Innu Health Commissions all provide mental health or addictions programming for the Innu.
 - The federal priority accorded to Innu issues has greatly diminished. A three-year Comprehensive Innu Healing Strategy, funded by the federal government, expired at the end of March, and the federal government has not determined what to do next. There is talk of a federal Cabinet submission this Fall for additional funding. In the meantime, the federal approach has been to seek to "normalize" spending on the Innu - to give them access to regular programming available to First Nations, but no more. This approach will likely continue until a crisis occurs of sufficient magnitude to attract sustained national/international media attention.

Reviewed by: P. Rodgers/S. MacDonald, Cabinet Secretariat
September 20, 2004