

Briefing Note
Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs

Title: Media Release of a Documentary on The Mushuau Innu - Surviving Canada

Issue: On October 13, 2004, Best Boy Productions and Omni Television held a media release of the documentary entitled *The Mushua Innu - Surviving Canada*.

Background:

- The documentary explores the impact that the federal government's failure to meet its constitutional obligations has had on the Innu and their future as a people. The documentary presents the Mushuau Innu as an Indian people who have suffered for many years in their living conditions, alcoholism, gas sniffing, suicides and chronic disease.
- The documentary places much of the blame on the federal government, citing the 1993 Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) report by Donald McRae and the followup CRHC report, November 2002, which reviewed the progress made by the federal government in meeting its fiduciary responsibilities to the Innu of Labrador. These reports condemned the federal government's treatment of the Innu and found the federal government had been in violation of the constitutional rights of the Innu for more than 50 years.
- The documentary is also critical of the lack of action by the provincial and federal governments with respect to child, youth and family services and the lack of culturally appropriate education programs in the community.
- Although the federal government has relocated the Mushuau Innu from Davis Inlet to Natuashish at a cost of \$153 million, agreed to register the Innu under the federal *Indian Act* in November 2002 and created a Reserve in Natuashish in December 2003, many of the social problems which existed in Davis Inlet continue today in the new community of Natuashish.

Province's Perspective:

- The Province has been working cooperatively with the federal government and the Innu band councils to assist with the development of long-term healing strategies. The social issues are complex and have developed over a long time. Therefore, strategies should focus on long-term solutions to have any real impact.
- The Province has made repeated attempts to work in partnership with the federal government and the Innu communities to improve the conditions for residents and give the Band increased control over provincial programs and services offered to Innu. Few of these attempts have met with success.
- The Province has urged the federal government to meet its full fiduciary and constitutional responsibility for the Innu communities.
- In September 2004 you raised the issues in Natuashish with the federal Minister of Health, Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh, who committed the federal government to do whatever it takes to help the Innu of Labrador and other Aboriginal communities.

- The Province has taken measures to restrict the delivery of alcohol to Natuashish by ferry. Natuashish is now a reserve under the federal *Indian Act*. As such, the band council can pass by laws banning alcohol in the community. To date, no such by-law has been passed.

Potential Speaking Points:

- It is difficult not to be moved by the images shown in this film.
- These problems developed over a long period and will take a long time to resolve.
- The Province has been working with the federal government, the Innu and Mushuau Innu prior to the relocation and since and will continue to work with the Band to resolve the problems in the community.
- It would go a long way to assisting all of us in our efforts, if the Band Council was prepared to address the issue of alcohol availability in the community. The RCMP and other authorities are limited in their ability to restrict the availability of alcohol in the community in the absence of a Band Council resolution that effectively makes the community dry.
- While this will be a difficult decision for the Band and the community, the Province is prepared to work with the Band, the federal government, the RCMP, and other authorities to assist and support this process.

Prepared by: Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs

Reviewed by: Cabinet Secretariat

October 14, 2004