

OPENING REMARKS
MICHAEL NEYELLE, ʔEHDZO GOT'INĒ GOTS'Ē NÁKEDI CHAIR
BNE ʔEKWĒ PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 1-3, 2016 DÉLĪNĒ, NWT



Opening Prayer

Call Public Hearing to Order

Good Morning Everyone. My name is Michael Neyelle and I am the Chair of the ʔehdzo Got'ine Gots'Ē Nákedı.

Thank you to all of you who are here today, as Board Members, Parties and community members. It is good to see how much people care about ʔekwĒ and that people are willing to give their time to work on these important issues.

We are here because we all care about the caribou. These hearings are a chance for all of us to be part of thinking about our relationship with ʔekwĒ, and how we can protect and live with Bluenose East ʔekwĒ in a way that ensures they will be there for our people in the future.

We may have different ideas what needs to be done, but that is what this hearing is about: getting a better understanding, together, and respectfully.

Dene people have lived with ʔekwĒ for many generations. Today, we must work together to make sure that our grandchildren's children will be able to live with ʔekwĒ. We must ask difficult questions of ourselves and others, such as "Have we been taking too many ʔekwĒ today?" and "What is happening that could be harming ʔekwĒ?" We must remember that there are other users of these same ʔekwĒ in the NWT and Nunavut. The SRRB must make a decision that is fair to everyone and yet allows the herd to be healthy and sustain itself.

The ʔehdzo Got'ine Gots'Ē Nákedı is holding these hearings because the Board has the responsibility for dealing with ʔekwĒ use and protection in the Sahtú region. We are a co-management Board established by the Sahtú Land Claim Agreement. It's a collaborative Board, with members from Dene communities and government who work together to bring together traditional knowledge and science so that we can protect wildlife and wildlife habitat. We are set up this way so that Dene and Métis hunting rights are respected and so that Dene communities can be directly involved in making decisions about the wildlife and the environment.

The SRRB is the main body that deals with wildlife in this region. Under the terms of the Land Claim Agreement, our Board must act in the public interest when we make decisions about wildlife.

Each Board Member here brings their own perspective and views but when we come together as a Board we act as one, we think about what the public needs – not just what we would like to see happen – and most importantly, we think about how we can all serve the caribou.

I would like to introduce the other ʔehdzo Got'ıne ʔotsé Nákedı's Board Members to you: Leonard Kenny, George Barnaby, Jeffery Walker, Lesley Allen and Paul Latour. Paul is the co-Chair and there will be times when he takes over to Chair the meeting and when I step aside as Chair. That will happen for sure when we get to Délıne's presentation, in order to ensure that we have a process.

The Board also has two Alternate Board members here today – Camilla Rabisca (who is an Alternate to George Barnaby and who fills in if George is not available). Patrick Bobinski (who is also an Alternate, is not with us this week).

We also have Special Advisors – these are people who attend our Board meetings to share their knowledge and help us think through issues but they don't vote if we have to vote on something. The Special Advisors here today are Leon Andrew, Keith Hickling and Fred Andrew.

At our hearings this week, we also welcome the Board Members from the Wek'èezhıi Renewable Resources Board: Jonas Lafferty, Interim Chair, Charlie Jeremick'ca, Archie Wetrade, Suzanne Carrière, Steven Matthews, Eddie Chocolate. Special Advisors are: Grant Pryznyk and Bruce MacDonald.

They came to hear what people in the Sahtu have to say about ʔekwé, because their Board has to make a decision too. They are making their own decision, and holding their own hearing in Behchoko in April. Our Board will also attend that hearing so we can hear what people in the Tıchq are saying about the ʔekwé.

We have with us Lorraine Land, our Legal Counsel, Colin Macdonald, our wildlife biologist, Joe Hanlon, Program Coordinator, and Deborah Simmons, our Executive Director. Daniel T'seleie is also working with the Board, based in Fort Good Hope.

During the week, the SRRB will conduct a hearing to consider two proposals: Délıne's Belarewılé ʔots'é ʔekwé – Caribou Forever plan, and ENR's Bluenose East Caribou Management Proposal.

The trigger for this hearing comes from the Land Claim Agreement. The proposals put forward by both Délıne and ENR make suggestions that the aboriginal harvest be limited; this means that a total allowable harvest needs to be considered.

The land claim agreement states that “a public hearing shall be held when the Board intends to consider establishing a total allowable harvest and a Sahtu Needs Level in respect of a species or population of wildlife which has not been subject to a total allowable harvest level within the previous two years.”

All the Parties have been raising concerns pointing to how caribou conservation must be understood holistically. Because of this, the Board has identified a range of key issues for consideration during this hearing based on the initial submissions and questions from all the Parties. The Board reviewed this list of key issues with the Parties. The list of issues is provided in the Hearing Agenda and is posted on the wall. There may be more key issues that show up in this hearing, but this list gives us all a beginning point to understand the main questions people are asking in this hearing.

The hearing has been broadly advertised and reported in the media, as well as on Facebook and in posters. As well, a public registry was established January 11, 2016 and updated regularly.

There are 12 registered parties for this Proceeding, 10 Sahtú organizations and ENR. We also have a new party, the Sahtu Youth Connection, who have been meeting here in Délı̨ne and who asked the Board for party status yesterday, and the Board approved them as a party. Unfortunately not all the Parties were able to send delegates – Fort Good Hope and Norman Wells are unable to participate, so there will be more time for discussion among those who are here. Parties also have opportunities to contribute after the hearing if they wish.

The Board's Staff and Legal Counsel have been working with the parties to ensure that this hearing process runs smoothly and that the Board secures the information that it needs to respond to the two proposals.

These proceedings are being recorded and will be transcribed later by a reporter from Digitran Inc. Therefore, I ask that when you speak, please start by saying your name and who you represent.

Also, I ask that you please be mindful that we have interpreters. These proceedings are being simultaneously translated, so please pace yourself accordingly. I will signal to speakers if they need to pause to allow interpreters to catch up. Sometimes we may need to pause when difficult concepts come up in Dene or English languages to make sure everyone understands what is meant.

Here is the order of how things will happen over the next three days. There are printed agendas in the back, and they are also on the Board's website. Here is what is happening:

- Today we will hear from ENR and Délı̨ne about their caribou proposals, first ENR this morning, then Délı̨ne this afternoon. They will each present their proposal. After each of their presentations, the other Parties and the Board can ask each of them questions about their proposal.

- Tonight we have planned an open public forum here at the arena, at 7:00 pm so visitors and community members can make comments to the Board or ask questions. We can check in later in the day if there's interest.
- Tomorrow, two of the Parties, Colville Lake and Tulit'a will make their presentations. And then there will be time for questions for each of them.
- Tomorrow night after supper, Délı̄ne is hosting a hand games tournament here. We invite all of you to come.
- On Thursday, we will hear from the new party in the hearing, the Sahtu Youth Connection, who will make a presentation and take questions. Then the Board's technical adviser, Colin Macdonald, will make a presentation and Parties can ask him questions about his presentation.
- Then we will have closing comments from ENR and Délı̄ne
- And on Thursday night, we will have a community feast.

There are people from the public who are really interested in what is going here at these hearings. As Board Chair, I am really happy to see that. If you are a member of the public and watching and want to say something to the Board, there is a chance for you to do that, or to ask questions. That chance will happen during the Public Forum tonight. If we aren't able to hear from everyone tonight, we will see if we can meet tomorrow night.

We will try to hear everyone who wants to say something, but the most important thing is that we want to make sure the Board has the chance to hear from the registered Parties in the hearing – Délı̄ne, ENR, Fort Good Hope, Colville Lake, Tulita and the Sahtu Youth Connection Group.

We also want to make it clear that there will be zero tolerance for people under the influence of alcohol or drugs at this hearing. If anyone is under the influence, they will be asked to leave.

Finally, the Board Members take their roles very seriously. We all care about doing a good job as Board Members and serving the Sahtu region and serving the wildlife.

In the lead up to this hearing, there was a motion from Colville Lake that asked three Board members to step aside. Colville brought a motion saying that Jeff Walker, Leonard Kenny and I were in a conflict of interest, or biased. It is a very serious charge to make, and one that the Board took very seriously. We heard legal submissions from Colville Lake, the Government of the Northwest Territories and Fort Good Hope. We talked to other northern land claim boards about their experience. We thought about what is in the public interest.

The Board has rules about conflict of interest. The most important rule is the one that our people agreed to in the Sahtu Land Claim Agreement. The Land Claim Agreement says there is a not a conflict of interest just because a Board member is

also an employee of government or a Sahtu organization employee or member, and doing their other work in those other organizations.

That makes sense for a land claims Board like ours.

The Land Claim Agreement sets up a wildlife co-management Board that is meant to make sure decisions are made collaboratively between government and Sahtu Dene communities. Our process is set up in a way that brings together Dene cultural perspectives and Canadian legal principles of fair procedure. The Board is, by its very nature, intended to bring together the Dene and government perspectives and experiences in a way that lets us work together and recognizes our different perspectives while ensuring we have one voice as one Board working in the public interest.

When we make decisions as a Board, we decide with one mind. Our own Board operating rules tells us that we work by consensus as much as possible. We decide on the basis of what is in the public interest, and what protects and conserves the wildlife and habitat. We decide based on listening . We don't park our perspectives or experience at the door, but our Board Members are expected to approach issues with an open mind and remain open to being persuaded. The Land Claim Agreement requires us to do that. Our own rules require us to do that.

When Colville Lake brought the motion last week, our Board had to make a decision and get the word out so that people knew whether this hearing was happening or not. The decision was made by the three Board members who were not named in the motion.

The Board released the outcome of the decision – that the Board does not believe that Jeff Walker, Leonard Kenny and I are in a conflict of interest or biased, and that the hearing shouldn't be adjourned. The Board's reasons for that decision will be released to the public by end of day on Friday or before, if possible.

To ensure that the hearing process is as fair as possible, I am stepping aside as Chair during the part of the hearing when Délı̨ne presents its proposal and takes questions. Paul Latour, the Vice Chair, will chair the meeting at that point. Leonard and I also won't participate in the Délı̨ne presentation, or the questions to Délı̨ne, or the answers from Délı̨ne. Like all the Board Members, Leonard and I will listen to all the evidence in the whole hearing, including what Délı̨ne has to say.

Similarly, Jeff Walker won't participate in the ENR presentation, or the questions to ENR, or the answers from ENR about the ENR proposal. Like all the Board Members, Jeff will listen to all the evidence in the whole hearing, including ENR's.

If any of the Parties has a concern, when we are in the middle of the hearing, that something has happened that shows that a Board Member may be in a conflict of interest or biased, we invite you to raise that issue and the Board can deal with it.

We are glad you are all here. We hope we can work with one mind – we may have different views on some issues but we all care about one thing: the caribou. That is the most important thing – respecting the caribou, caring about the caribou. We are all here because we care.

Before I ask the Parties if there are any other preliminary or initial matters we should deal with, I'm going to turn it over to our Board Member and elder, George Barnaby.

[GEORGE SPEAKS]

Now, we can proceed to the ENR presentation – are there any other preliminary or legal issues before the ENR panel starts?