

16 May, 2022

Dear Members of the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the 2021 Déljné Public Listening Session, held April 25-29 virtually. The Fort Good Hope delegation enjoyed the discussion and learning from other communities, governments and Indigenous Knowledge holders.

With this letter, and on behalf of the Fort Good Hope Panel, I would like to present our closing written statement. Fort Good Hope Panel Members met on Tuesday May 3rd to debrief the Public Listening Session and identify what we would like to share as our closing statement.

Support community Conservation Plans as a priority

We heard during the Public Listening a strong consensus from all Sahtú community delegations that our cultural values, Indigenous Knowledge and ɬɛɬa cannot conform to the western approaches and notions of wildlife *management*. As such, I would like to emphasize that we firmly support the planning work that has been led by Déljné Got'jné and members of the Behdzi Adha First Nation. We are committed to pursuing our own community conservation planning process in Fort Good Hope, one that is rooted in Indigenous Knowledge and ɬɛɬa.

The Fort Good Hope Caribou Plan will be comprehensive – it will be about the animals, land and water. We intend to work closely with all interested residents in Fort Good Hope, including young people, who can learn about Dene values and harvesting practices through the process. Our planning process will also involve a number of leadership organizations in Fort Good Hope. For example, the K'asho Got'jné Foundation is currently in the process of developing the management plan for T'sudé Niljné Tuyeta. It is critical that we have an effective, iterative, transparent and inclusive process through which we can involve many community members and also ensure that the community caribou plan is complementary to and congruent with the management plan of the Indigenous Protected and Conservation Area. It is also essential that the community caribou plan is rooted in our Indigenous Knowledge, which takes time to talk about, document and validate. Such processes take time and individuals need to be supported financially to take part meaningfully. As such, the development of the community caribou plan must occur over a series of meeting to ensure meaningful participation. We therefore call on the Board and on Government to fund the community caribou planning process adequately over time, and ensuring that funding covers at minimum the following:

- Three workshops each year with budget for space rental, interpretation, and catering
- Professional services to support the planning process, including both professional planning support for facilitation and note-taking for the three workshops and advice from our legal counsel.
- Honoraria for the time of leadership, harvesters and other Indigenous Knowledge holders in the three annual workshops.

We already have some consensus among our panel about some priorities that will likely be addressed within the Fort Good Hope community caribou plan, including the following:

- We are concerned about climate change and want to continue developing research and monitoring programs to understand the effects of climate change, including permafrost thaw, on the land, water and wildlife.
- Our plan will focus on strategies for supporting the resurgence of K’asho Got’ıne culture, language, traditions, values and Indigenous Knowledge.
- We have always harvested other animals when there are few caribou, so our plan would help us to do continue this approach to stewardship. For instance, with many muskox now in the area, we would like to learn from people in Sachs Harbour, for example, the best ways and times to harvest and prepare muskox.
- Our Plan will help us to practice our Indigenous Rights in our own area.
- Through the process and in the plan, we also want to revisit the Group Trapping Area, which had been intended to protect our Indigenous Rights as stewards in the district.
- The process and the Plan itself will also help us to understand, clarify, and strengthen the role and responsibilities of the Renewable Resource Council to lead stewardship initiatives.
- We will define what should happen on our land.

Respect wildlife and the balance that they have with one another

Until a Plan is developed, the animals need to be left alone. We have consistently, clearly and emphatically expressed this message during the Public Listening, in our first and section responses to information requests and again at our most recent presentation at the April 25-29 Public Listening. Our Dene Knowledge and ɛɛɛ require us to respect all of the animals – they have their own cycles and way of balancing predators and prey. Population numbers of animals, including all of the animals that we have been discussing during the April 25-29 Public Listening - ɛɛɛ, ɛɛɛ, bele, and ɛɛɛ, sasho, shıta ɛɛɛ – have their own cycles and rhythms. They live in balance with one another and all other animals and if a population is high, as the bele population now is, it will moderate itself because its food source will become low.

If programs to harvest wolf are to be encouraged, they need to come from our own community planning processes; they cannot be brought into the Sahtú as a top-down process from the department of Environment and Natural Resources. If we decided in the future to have programs to encourage wolf harvesting, these programs would need to be designed by us and to respect bele and Dene ɛɛɛ. We anticipate that community planning may support programs which only involve trapping and would be consistent with Dene harvesting practices, while encouraging and supporting K’asho Got’ıne to be on the land and to be the rightful stewards of the land.

We understand that people who live in the Tıjchq have the same objectives as us, but different ways of doing things. We would like to watch what happens in the Tıjchq region, learn from the Tıjchq and then use that information to inform what we do in our own region. However, this can only happen if there is a clear plan in place to monitor the success of the Tıjchq region bele harvesting program. We want to know:

- What would success look like for the Tıjchq region bele harvesting program?
- How will the Tıjchq Government and the Government of Northwest Territories know if the program is a success?

- How can we learn about the efficacy of these methods used in the program?

It is also important for the regions to meet and share what we are learning and talk about our approaches and Dene values. The public listening has been good to learn from one another, but it is important to meet in person and in ways that enable all of us to speak comfortably, in a less formal setting. We encourage the Board and the Governments of the Northwest Territories and Canada to fund these opportunities as part of the Tłıchq's program. We strongly encourage the Tłıchq Government and the Government of Northwest Territories to establish clear ways of monitoring success and sharing this information.

Resource Deshįta Got'įneę

Though all of our planning, environmental stewardship and cultural restoration work that we have touched on here, and throughout the Public Listening Session process are expressly part of the mandate of the Renewable Resources Council, as defined in the Sahtú Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, we do not have the capacity to do any of this work. For years the Deshįta Got'įneę (Fort Good Hope Renewable Resources Council) received almost no funding. Now, we have funding for a full-time staff member, but it is still a nominal amount that creates the illusion that the Renewable Resources Councils are being funded, without recognizing our full mandate. With adequate funding, we would be able to truly implement our mandate defined in the claim – we would have Guardians on the ground consistently stewarding the environment, monitoring the land, and practicing our culture. We would establish stronger research programs to understand changes we are seeing on our fish lakes. We would have consistent programming to hold on-the-land camps to rebuild our intergenerational relationships and restore the strength of our culture. We would be resourced to focus on the youth and talk to them about our Traditional Knowledge, values and ęęę. We would document our place-based Indigenous Knowledge on maps, and teach them where to find moose, caribou, beaver, and various kinds of fish.

Adopt a reconciliatory approach to conservation

The federal and territorial governments, including the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, must adopt a reconciliatory approach to conservation and harvesting decisions that fulfills the government's legal obligation to ensure that we as Dene have the right to harvest in accordance with Dene values and are meaningfully involved in conservation and harvesting decisions in our traditional territories. Dene conservation and harvesting rights are legally protected in the Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (the "Land Claim Agreement"); the *Wildlife Act*, SNWT 2013, c30 (the "*Wildlife Act*"); and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the "UN Declaration").

Respect our right to Exercise Dene Values in Harvesting

As Dene, we live and harvest in accordance with our traditional values passed on from our elders. Our right to live and harvest in accordance with our traditional values is legally protected in the Land Claim Agreement, the *Wildlife Act* and the UN Declaration.

One of the primary objectives of the Land Claim Agreement is to “recognize and encourage the way of life of the Sahtu Dene and Metis, which is based on the cultural and economic relationship between them and the land.” It is another objective to encourage the self-sufficiency of the Sahtu Dene and Metis to enhance full participation in the economy.

In the recitals of the *Wildlife Act*, the Government of the Northwest Territories states that it “recognizes and respects the Aboriginal and treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples, including harvesting rights.” In addition, at subsection 2(1)(d) of the *Act*, the Government of the Northwest Territories is required to exercise its powers, duties and other functions under the *Act* in accordance with the principle that “traditional Aboriginal values and practices in relation to the harvesting and conservation of wildlife are to be recognized and valued.”

Article 20(1) of the UN Declaration also protects Indigenous peoples right to “maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.”

Harvesting is an integral part of the Dene way of life. Harvesting is an expression of our culture and spirituality; an economic activity and a means of sustenance.

Our rights to harvest in accordance with our Dene values is therefore legally protected under the Land Claim Agreement, the *Wildlife Act* and the UN Declaration. The Government of the Northwest Territories current tag-based approach to harvesting does not respect our rights to harvest in accordance with our values. To ensure our rights are meaningfully protected, the Government of the Northwest Territories must engage Dene in conservation and harvesting decisions

Respect our right to Participate in Decision-Making

Dene have a legally protected right to participate in harvesting and conservation decisions in our traditional territories.

One of the objectives of the Land Claim Agreement is to provide the Sahtu Dene and Metis with wildlife harvesting rights and the right to participate in decision making concerning wildlife harvesting and management.

In addition, article 26(2) of the UN Declaration protects Indigenous peoples right to “own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use.” Article 29(1) of the UN Declaration also protects Indigenous peoples right to “conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources.”

Dene have not been adequately involved in conservation and harvesting decisions in our traditional territories.

The government has made strong and meaningful commitments to protect Dene rights to harvesting in accordance with our traditional values and participation in harvesting and conservation decisions.

Future harvesting and conservation decisions must respect these commitments. It's about respect. It's about reconciliation.

Our closing recommendations

In closing, I would like to summarize our recommendations to the Board and to other Parties of the 2021 Déljné Public Listening. In brackets, we have added the Party or Parties to which we think the recommendation is most relevant.

- Support the development of community conservation planning and implementation through policy, regulation and financial support. (The Government of Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada)
- Recognize the development of community caribou planning and other community stewardship planning and implementation of these plans as a core vehicle by which to implement the Sahtú Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (Government of Canada, Government of Northwest Territories, Sahtú Secretariat)
- Ensure that financial support is sufficient to enable iterative and broad engagement processes within each Sahtú community and between communities. (Government of Canada, Government of Northwest Territories, Sahtú Secretariat, Sahtú Renewable Resources Board)
- Create and fund opportunities for Sahtú communities to work together outside of the formal hearing process. (Government of Canada, Government of Northwest Territories, Sahtú Secretariat, Sahtú Renewable Resources Board)
- Develop a stronger, more transparent way of measuring success for the wolf harvesting program and to learn about its efficacy as it proceeds (Tłjchq Government, Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board, Government of Northwest Territories)
- Adequately fund each Renewable Resources Council in the Sahtú to implement its mandate as defined within the Sahtú Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, recognizing that enabling the Councils will enable community-led stewardship rooted in Dene ɁɁɁ
- Create and fund opportunities for people in the Sahtú to learn from others about their approaches to harvesting and preparing Ɂejire.

Respectfully,

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Appendix 1

K'asho Got'Ine yatı glossary

ʔədə - Barrenground caribou

ʔejire - Muskox

Bele - Wolf

Dene béré – Dene food

Deshıta Got'Ine - People of the bush (Fort Good Hope Renewable Resources Council)

K'ásho Got'Ine - people from this region

Sasho - Bear

Shíta goʔədə - Mountain caribou

Sóúgots'ąʔa - Making plans / planning

Tqdzi - Woodland caribou