

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, January 14, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA CHIEFS COUNCIL REJECT ONTARIO GOVERNMENT-IMPOSED DEADLINE TODAY DURING DECLARED STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED REVISIONS OF THE *FAR NORTH ACT*, 2010

Thunder Bay, ON – Following the declaration of Premier of Ontario Doug Ford on Tuesday January 12, 2021 of a second state of emergency across the province of Ontario due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Matawa Chiefs Council are issuing a public statement that the Matawa Chiefs Council reject the Ontario government-imposed deadline of Thursday January 14, 2021 for comments related to Ontario’s proposed revisions of the *Far North Act*, 2010 and demand that the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry Hon. John Yakabuski halt the inappropriate and continued attempts of the Ontario government to proceed with engagement activities on legislation impacting the Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of First Nations at this time.

The Matawa Chiefs Council requests that the Government of Ontario cease all activities that impact the rights and interests of the Matawa member First Nations until after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

During the COVID-19 crisis first declared on March 17 2020, the Ontario government has proceeded with the numerous legislative, policy and regulatory changes to position government, industry and investors to prepare for access to wealth and resources in the remote north of Ontario.

Matawa Chiefs Council Comments

“Our First Nations are treaty partners with Ontario and Canada,” said Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, Marten Falls First Nation. “As equal treaty partners, in order to meaningfully participate in any process that impacts and defines our rights—we require the opportunity and proper resources for First Nations to be represented at the table. Ontario will have to respect Matawa member First Nations while we address the immediate priority and concerns of COVID-19 and the well-being of our members.”

– *Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, Marten Falls First Nation*

“Along with all communities across Canada and Ontario, First Nations are challenged by the COVID-19 global pandemic and the compounded long-term issues in our First Nations related to housing, the cost of living and access to goods, supplies and clean water are in addition to the danger posed by the disease,” said Chief Cornelius Wabasse, Webequie First Nation. “We need to keep the emphasis and priority on the safety and protection of our vulnerable communities and members.”

– *Chief Cornelius Wabasse, Webequie First Nation*

STATEMENTS FROM MATAWA CHIEFS COUNCIL - CONTINUED

“The extensive efforts by the Ontario government’s legislative proposal to erase the specific term ‘Far North’ from the Far North Act including a proposal to ‘change the name’ of the Far North Act, will have significant and permanent impacts to the Inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of our First Nations and members under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982,” stated Chief Harvey Yesno, Eabametoong First Nation. “Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario has been unashamed in its aggressive approach to prepare to access the wealth and resources of the James Bay Treaty No. 9 territory and we remind Ontario that our rights are of a higher priority than the interests of government, general stakeholders and industry investors who are knowingly or unknowingly complicit and supporting these activities. Matawa Chiefs Council has always presented a position of partnership and investor certainty while respecting First Nation autonomy. This is not a simple legislative revision proposal; the Far North Act is part of the colonial control mechanisms on the homelands and economy of our People. Its revision, repeal or options to be developed for our First Nation’s consideration directly impact and dictate the economy and quality of life of our members.”

– Chief Harvey Yesno, Eabametoong First Nation

Important Notes to Press Statement

- The land Ontario refers to as the *Far North* is predominantly land subject to the James Bay Treaty # 9 (1905-06 and 1929-30).
- The issues are complex, consistently changing and the Matawa Chiefs Council and Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) reserve the right to assess and reassess their positions and information stated as development unfolds.
- The Matawa Chiefs Council and Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) has nine (9) member First Nations and respects the autonomy of each member First Nation.
- This statement is without prejudice to the positions Long Lake #58 First Nation takes, or may take, on the issue of whether Long Lake #58 First Nation is a party to any Treaty.

Additional Background Information

- **Proposed Amendments to the Far North Act, 2010** - Environmental Registry of Ontario <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-2684>
- **The Far North Act, 2010** <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/10f18>

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