

Government Orders

Many of the bands are currently examining economic development avenues, which will lead to better utilization of the land and the return of additional revenues for use by the aboriginal people themselves for purposes that are very important to the development and continuation of those aboriginal communities.

The minister mentioned it but I thought I should as well and that is: Why is Saskatchewan a party to this agreement? Why do we single out Saskatchewan in this case and not all Indian people?

In 1930 the federal government transferred the bulk of the Crown land and resources in Saskatchewan to the Saskatchewan government. The federal government was aware at that time that more land might be required in the future to supply the number of reserve acres promised in the treaties.

The natural resources transfer agreement of 1930, which transferred the Crown land to Saskatchewan, enables Canada to request the province to provide unoccupied Crown land to fulfil outstanding treaty land entitlements. This is the basis for the Government of Saskatchewan's involvement in the treaty land entitlement process at this time.

Past efforts to settle treaty land entitlement with Crown land alone have met with only limited success. Most Crown land has interests of various types associated with it. Without funding to provide compensation it has been difficult to satisfy the interest holders on Crown land. This was a matter that Treaty Commissioner Wright tried to address, and addressed quite well.

The treaty land entitlement framework agreement provides a new and more promising approach that will work to all parties' advantage. Bands will have more choice in the land they acquire and will have the option of purchasing private land from parties that want to sell.

Entitlement bands will now perhaps be able to obtain more productive land than they have in the past and as a result can possibly become more economically self-sufficient in the future.

Certain categories of provincial Crown land, such as parks, heritage properties, highways and ecological reserves, are only available for purchase under this agreement under very exceptional circumstances. Other categories of Crown land will generally be available for purchase, with the sale decision depending on specific circumstances.

One of the important parts of this whole process is that bands can buy private land that is for sale anywhere in the province just as any other purchaser could.

Crown land in urban areas, as elsewhere in Saskatchewan, may also be available to bands for purchase. Therefore we can see that urban land, economic development land, and industrial land is eligible for purchase under these agreements. The establishment of urban aboriginal industrial economic communities is most viable under this process.

When lands gain reserve status, and this is important to all the rural municipalities in Saskatchewan, it is no longer subject to municipal or school taxation. Recognizing this fact the governments have agreed to compensate for this tax loss in the rural areas. Two \$25 million compensation funds have been established, one for rural municipality tax loss and one for school division tax loss.

The rural municipality fund will be administered by the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. The school division fund will be administered by the Saskatchewan department of education in consultation with the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association. They are moves that both groups have accepted and agreed will provide for their interests.

After signing or adhering to the framework agreement a band must also conclude a specific agreement, a trust agreement, with Canada before receiving funding for the land purchases.

• (1145)

The length of time taken to conclude these may vary from band to band but the process need not be long. Depending on how quickly these agreements can be finalized, many of the bands will be in the marketplace quickly. We have to recognize that a number of bands have already taken these steps and are currently in the marketplace.

One of the problems inherent in this process is the resources available to the bands to ensure that members of each reserve, of each band, are adequately informed about what is in the agreement. Many of the chiefs and the councillors involved in this process from the very beginning understood this agreement inside and out and can quote it chapter and verse. Many of the ordinary people living on the reserves have not been part of the process. They have questions. They are sceptical about what it means for their future and about what it means for the future of their children. They are trying to find a way to get as much information as possible.