

Statements by Ministers

matters. The negotiations will be consistent with the Government's policy on community based Indian and Inuit self-government, will respect existing constitutional principles and government practice, and will take into account any directions north of 60 toward public Government and devolution.

As we all know, the test for any self-government arrangement is its appropriateness in meeting the needs of native communities and its capacity to enhance the quality of life of individual members of the communities. I believe the policy provides for that.

The policy also contains important provisions aimed at enhancing native decision making in the area of natural resources. In this regard it is expected that settlements will recognize a particular aboriginal managerial interest in relation to environmental matters including land use, water, and wildlife.

It is particularly important to note that the federal Government stands ready to negotiate matters related to the harvesting and management of renewable resources with aboriginal groups which have made traditional use of coastal and other marine areas.

● (1110)

In addition, under the new policy, the federal Government is prepared to assign to aboriginal groups a percentage of the Crown's royalties derived from the extraction of resources in the entire settlement area. I should add that this option will include not only the royalties from subsurface resources, but also from non-renewable resources extracted from offshore areas that form part of the claims settlement area. In addition, we will be instituting a number of important principles and processes aimed at ensuring the more expeditious negotiation and settlement of claims. We stand on the threshold of what I hope to be many comprehensive claims settlements in the coming years, more living treaties and lasting agreements. We have the tools; all that is required is the good will and co-operation of all parties.

Many months ago, the Hon. Member for Rosedale laid the cornerstones for the Government's aboriginal policies and cemented a new and growing relationship with native people. It is upon this foundation—Indian self-government, economic development, quality of community life, and the protection of the special relationship between the federal Government and Indian people—that my colleagues and I have continued to build. My sincere hope is that we can continue travelling down this road together. I hope all Members of this House will support this policy initiative as it affects native people and all Canadians.

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by commending both the Minister and his predecessor for recognizing the urgent need for a new comprehensive claims policy. It was called for by the Special Committee on Indian Self-government in Canada, as the Minister mentioned. It has long been demanded by the claimant groups.

It is self-evident that we need a new claims policy because so few claims have been settled. That is the case and it is to our shame.

There is a growing insistence by the territorial Governments, by those who advocate aboriginal rights, and by those who wish to proceed with developmental plans on aboriginal lands, that settlements be made and that they be made as soon as possible. I say that the guiding light for a new comprehensive claims policy certainly lies with that excellent report by Mr. Murray Coolican, known as the Coolican Report. What the Minister has announced today as a new comprehensive claims policy is not precisely, fully and exactly as contained in the Coolican Report. It is, I submit, a careful, cautious and modest step from what we had before. In other words, I acknowledge to the Minister and the House that the new comprehensive claims policy is an improvement on the past. It is progressive and a step forward.

However, the difficulty with the new claims policy, as with the old, is that it stems from a premise narrow in scope and fragile in structure, that is, that aboriginal title involves traditional use and occupancy which continues in certain respects up to the present. This so-called title as the Government sees it is an annoyance. It is a thorn in its side which must somehow be removed so that the Government of Canada can get on with its dealings and arrangements with third parties in order to advance and enhance what it describes as the public interest. I wish to assert to the House and the Minister that the premise which underlies aboriginal title is neither narrow in scope nor fragile in construction. It is broadly based and very firm and strong.

What is really in question in Canada today, what is in doubt, is the Crown's right. Where aboriginal title is being asserted and where there is no treaty or agreement in existence, there, Sir, the Crown right is in doubt. I therefore argue that the impetus to settle rests much more with the Government than with any claimant group. For us to define aboriginal title in its narrowest terms, I say to this Government as I said to the previous Government, is both arrogant and presumptuous. Some argue that aboriginal title is limited or confined only to traditional pursuits, hunting, fishing and trapping. Even in those areas Governments always seek ways to limit and control. Now, with this new policy, I suspect the attitude remains very much the same as in the past. The difference is that the Government is saying to the aboriginal claimant groups that it is prepared to be a little more generous, a little more open-handed than Governments in the past. For example, the new claims policy says that the federal Government is prepared to assign a percentage of Crown royalties from extraction of resources in the entire settlement area. I say to the Government that aboriginal title is all inclusive, not exclusive. It is not limited to traditional pursuits based solely on use and occupancy in the past. A sharing of revenues from resource development is not largesse or generosity by the Government or people of Canada. It must be part and parcel of an agreement reached through negotiation.