

*Government Orders*

Under the terms of an umbrella final agreement signed last year by the federal and territorial governments and the council for Yukon Indians the government is committed to negotiate individual self-government agreements with each of the 14 individual First Nations. In fact, four of these First Nations signed self-government agreements at that time. These were Champagne and the Aishihik First Nation, the First Nation of Na-cho-ny'a'k-dun, the Teslin Tlingit Council and the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation.

• (1610)

Self-government for these First Nations which cover about 36 per cent of the total Yukon aboriginal population will take effect immediately with the passage of this legislation.

The government is currently engaged in active negotiations with an additional five First Nations. I am optimistic that several of these will be completed by the end of this year. I hope that the government will also commence self-government negotiations with at least some of the last five First Nations later this year.

Overall, we expect to have completed self-government agreements with all 14 First Nations within five years.

Before reviewing some of the main features of this legislation, I would like to make clear to the House exactly what we mean by self-government in the context of this bill.

These agreements were negotiated under the previous government's community based self-government policy. They make no reference to the inherent right of self-government and they will not receive constitutional protection as treaty rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act upon passage of this bill.

I have indicated to the council for Yukon Indians, however, that I will consider this matter very seriously and once I and my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, have finished our consultation on the implementation of the inherent right we will be reporting to cabinet and back to the council of Yukon Indians.

The principles embodied in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution of Canada as a whole will continue to apply. First Nation constitutions will also provide protections for the rights and freedoms of First Nation citizens.

Although the council for Yukon Indians has long held that Yukon First Nations have an inherent right of self-government and have lobbied long and hard to see it recognized, it was their strongly expressed wish that we proceed quickly with this

legislation rather than delay the legislation pending the outcome of the inherent right of self-government.

I believe this was a wise decision on their part. By proceeding now on the basis of the current policy they will begin to reap the benefits of self-government at the earliest possible date.

At the same time, the agreement provides that the Yukon First Nations will in no way be precluded from benefiting from any rights or entitlements that might arise from the discussions I am carrying out at present with the aboriginal, provincial and territorial leaders on the implementation of the inherent right of self-government.

I would also like to comment at this time on the very constructive role played by the territorial government in these negotiations. They were tripartite negotiations throughout and indeed much of the work of implementing self-government will involve interface, co-operation and compromise between the First Nations and the Yukon government.

The territorial government has been very supportive throughout this process and the Yukon legislature has already passed self-government legislation which will come into effect as soon as this act is proclaimed.

Turning to the main points of the bill, one of the most important features is that it establishes First Nations as a legal entity with the power to enter contracts, to acquire land and to form corporations. This is a very important step in empowering the First Nations to manage their affairs and to plan and carry out their economic and social development.

The Indian Act will not apply to the First Nations or their citizens or settlement land with five exceptions. First, the Indian Act will apply for the purpose of determining which Yukon First Nation citizens are Indians within the meaning of the Indian Act.

Second, the Indian Act will continue to apply to reserves outside Yukon held for the use and benefit of a Yukon First Nation predecessor band. There are four such reserves held for two Yukon First Nations.

Third, the application of the Indian Act to reserves in Yukon is subject to negotiation.

Fourth, the minister's authority under the Indian Act to administer individual Indian money, which the minister currently holds, will continue.