

Government Orders

Governments are using a number of consultative mechanisms to ensure that third parties affected by the treaty process voice their perspectives, their concerns, their interests, their ideas. We heard from one of the previous speakers on the government side, the hon. member for Edmonton West, how the treaty negotiations advisory committee provides advice to both governments on sectoral issues on a province-wide basis. To ensure that the interests of regional parties are being addressed, the negotiating teams work with local sectoral groups to form regional advisory committees, RACs as they are called.

There is an overall umbrella of 31 organizations to which the member made reference which cover the general interests of people in the province. In addition, there are the local bodies or the regional advisory committees. They are formed in areas where negotiations are beginning. They include representatives from the local non-aboriginal governments as well as from a variety of sectors such as industry, business, social services, resources and environment.

The establishment of a regional advisory committee is one of the conditions for the British Columbia Treaty Commission declaring a negotiating table ready for negotiations to commence. Eight regional advisory committees have been established in communities across British Columbia so far.

The lower mainland regional advisory committee, which meets in Vancouver, provides advice to the provincial and federal teams that are or will be negotiating with the Burrard, the Katzie, the Musqueam, the Squamish and the Tsawwassen. Issues which are of concern to this regional advisory committee include the use of federal crown lands, treaty settlements, Stanley Park, taxation and provision of services to the aboriginal community.

The Bulkley-Skeena regional advisory committee located in Smithers provides advice on negotiations with the Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en and the Gitanyow. Their concerns centre on the use of lands and resources, particularly forest and fish. Governance is also an important component.

On my own Vancouver Island there are two regional advisory committees. The west island RAC in Port Alberni is working with the negotiators for the Ditidaht First Nation and the Nuw-Chah-Nulth tribal council to ensure that the interests of local communities are addressed. Issues such as interim measures, fishing, forestry and environmental concerns are being addressed.

The south island RAC covers Victoria and extends north to Nanaimo. There are currently two First Nations in the first phases of the negotiation process, the Temexw and the Nanaimo. As other First Nations enter the treaty process, this regional advisory committee will be expanded to include representatives from additional interest groups.

There are others. There are a total of eight in other parts of the province. I will not go into each one in turn but to say that the overall system of regional advisory committees is well in place. It is working well and all local interests in those areas are involved in the negotiation process.

The regional advisory committee sets its own terms of reference including the meeting times, locations, subjects for discussion, openness of meetings and membership. The regional advisory committees are becoming more active in areas where the parties are moving into framework negotiations.

Despite the regional advisory committees and despite the umbrella organization discussed by my colleague, there have been public criticisms of the consultative process. Concerns have been raised that the interests of non-aboriginal people were not being properly represented at the negotiating table. As has been indicated by my colleague from the Western Arctic, this is incorrect. In order to dispel many of these concerns, federal and provincial representatives have made significant efforts to convey information about the treaty process. Local community officials are contacted for input on appropriate representative organizations for inclusion on any RAC being formed in their area.

• (1610)

The treaty commission process ensures that both the federal and provincial governments are responsible for representing the non-aboriginal interests at the table. It is the role of both governments to listen to all these other interests, to consider their positions and their views and to develop a balanced negotiating strategy that fairly represents the interests of the communities involved, as well as of course the interests of the province as a whole and the country as a whole.

This government recognizes that the treaty process is important to everyone and will affect not only aboriginal people. A consultation process that works effectively is critical to the success of the treaty making process. The federal government is committed to consulting non-aboriginal people and third parties throughout the negotiating process.

Third party interests have been active in British Columbia throughout the treaty negotiations to date. They will continue to play an important role as these negotiations progress. The challenge before us is to ensure that we continue to develop a new relationship that encourages open dialogue and permits us to carefully consider all available options.

It was a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-107.

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have one question of the hon. member which relates to the five commissioners.