



News Release

Premier Okalik to Ottawa: Don't give away Nunavut self-reliance

IQALUIT, Nunavut (March 27, 2002) - Premier Paul Okalik has put the federal government on notice he will not allow Ottawa to give away commercial fishing rights that Nunavut needs to become self-reliant.

"Nunavut wants to become self-reliant as soon as possible. How can we make progress when Nunavut resources are given away by the federal government," Premier Okalik asked.

The Premier was commenting on an agreement-in-principle, initialed March 26, 2002 involving islands in Hudson Bay, James Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay.

The Government of Nunavut has been part of the federal negotiating team. In all other respects, Nunavut supports the agreement-in-principle, which includes land and water management and wildlife provisions for these islands.

The agreement-in-principle hands the Inuit of northern Quebec, represented by the Makivik Corp., fishing rights in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, which are between Nunavut and Greenland.

"This is an agreement-in-principle about the islands off northern Quebec. How this involves fishing interests in an area that stretches right up the Grise Fiord, thousands of kilometers away, is beyond logic," Premier Okalik said.

"Nunavut's fishing industry has made significant progress. However, it is severely restricted by low quotas. The agreement-in-principle violates all recognized principles of adjacency."

"This is a slap in our face. I have made our position very clear in discussions with the Prime Minister and the federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs.

"This wouldn't happen anywhere else in Canada. There is no proof of any title by the Inuit of northern Quebec to our offshore, yet rights are being implicated through this agreement-in-principle," Premier Okalik said.

The Government of Nunavut asked that an article regarding fishing rights to the Inuit of northern Quebec in waters between Greenland and Nunavut be removed from the agreement-in-principle so that it could be dealt with as a separate item.

"I met with the President of Makivik Corporation last week and received that group's approval to have the article removed at this point in the process," Premier Okalik said. "Unfortunately, the federal government chose to proceed without our consent and against our objections."

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