



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

## **2023**

***MOVING  
FORWARD  
IN UNITY***

**Regional Chief Joanna Bernard**  
NB AFN





'Qey/'Kwey,

I begin by acknowledging that on this day, December 8th , 2023 for our Annual General Assembly (AGA) we are gathering on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, whose presence dates back to time immemorial.

Greetings Knowledge Keepers, Chiefs, Councillors, and Friends. It is my honor to present my annual report to the New Brunswick First Nations Chiefs-in-Assembly. This report covers the period of November 2022 to December 2023.

This year has been an especially exciting and busy time. I have proudly continued my role as Regional Chief of NB. However, at the July 2023 Annual General Assembly in Halifax, NS, I was appointed Interim National Chief (INC) until the role of a new elected National Chief could be filled at the December Special Chiefs Assembly (SCA). I would like to express my appreciation to the New Brunswick Chiefs for their patience and support as I fulfilled the new role. Additionally, I extend special thanks to Chief Rebecca Knockwood for her support throughout my tenure as Interim National Chief and for stepping into the role of Proxy Regional Chief for several responsibilities I previously held.



## Board of Directors



**Chief Rebecca Knockwood**  
Amlamgog Nation  
(Fort Folly First Nation)



**Chief Gabriel Atwin**  
Bilijk First Nation  
(Kingsclear First Nation)



## Staff



**Lisa Tomah**  
Executive Assistant



**Tawnia Morin**  
Financial Clerk



## Regional Key Issues and Activities:

### Priority Issue: Call for New Relationships with the Province of New Brunswick

In the New Brunswick (NB) Region, my top priority as Regional Chief (RC) is to continue the call for a new relationship with the current provincial government. Our First Nation Communities seek greater autonomy, recognition of rights, and meaningful engagement in decisions that affect our lands and resources. In New Brunswick, our First Nations have often called for a nation-to-nation relationship with the provincial government. This call is based on the desire for mutual respect between governments, recognition of Indigenous rights, and self-determination.

Earlier this year, the Province of New Brunswick (PNB) tax sharing agreements with the Wolastoqey First Nations expired. Mi'gmaq Community's agreements will expire by the end of this year. The Higgs government purposes to identify areas it sees as priorities. This re-enforces the paternalistic type governing we have fought so hard to steer away from.

Both, Wolastoqey and Mi'gmaq Nations, have initiated title claims against the Province of New Brunswick and certain companies who have freehold lands.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the New Brunswick Assembly of First Nations Regional Office (NBAFN) met with Premier Higgs on September 12, 2023. NBAFN still holds hope that this was a positive step towards fostering a new positive relationship that promotes dialogue and addresses the unique needs of the communities.

AFN and NBAFN had expressed concerns regarding the Government of New Brunswick's (GNB) approach to First Nations engagement. During the meeting, NBAFN urged Premier Higgs to engage with First Nations leaders, recognize and acknowledge their inherent rights, and provide a space that would foster trust, understanding, and reconciliation. NBAFN also noted that by actively involving First Nations leaders in the decision-making processes and providing platforms for their voices to be heard would demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusivity and empowerment.

To advance the priorities and mandates of the communities, NBAFN proposed a round table discussion with all 15 New Brunswick Chiefs be held in the coming weeks.



# Safe Drinking Water

The Government of Canada (GOC) initiated engagement with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) for the Act Respecting Drinking Water, Wastewater and Related Infrastructure on First Nation Lands in December 2022. Revisions and multiple versions of the Act was developed with this working group in the following months. On February 17th, 2023, a version of the Act was released for public review for communities on a national level to provide feedback regarding concerns, priorities, and recommendations, to respective AFN Regional Chiefs by March 10th, 2023.

For the NB Region, NBAFN in partnership with the NSMTC, hosted an engagement session on February 21st with community operators, Chiefs, members of Councils, and Circuit Rider Trainers. This engagement session, held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Moncton, with the goal of obtaining feedback from communities and community representatives in order to present them to Regional Chief Joanna Bernard. The current process for the engagement feedback is for Regional Chiefs to gather and present their collective feedback from First Nation communities to GOC before the Act is introduced to the Parliament House on March 20th, 2023.

The engagement session on February 21st (and a subsequent zoom meeting on March 6th) provided substantial and important feedback from New Brunswick's First Nations. Under the umbrella of protecting water, main priorities regarding this proposed Act were identified as funding, time and resources, ownership of First Nation data, involvement of leaderships, capacity requirements, and succession planning.

Several critical concerns were discussed, such as the timeline of the legislation which was expressed to be unacceptable as it is currently scheduled. Worries toward capacity building, both to abide by the requirements of the proposed Act and to meet the increasing demands of population growth, were also discussed. Funding and resources were discussed at length, as well as the frustrations and apprehensions expressed towards the provincial government and its role in the current proposed Act.

Other concerns regarding the involvement of leadership, anxiety with the lack of communications regarding this proposed Act, and pushing the concern of the timeline to the forefront of conversations. Relationship building was an aspect discussed as well, both to improve the communication but also aid in the capacities of First Nations. General concerns regarding the involvement of First Nations in the development of this proposed Act were also raised:

1. Inadequate Consultation Process
2. Funding
3. Capacity of Regulations
4. Immunity Clause for GOC
5. Regulatory Monitoring
6. Lack of Wastewater Considerations



Numerous recommendations were outlined in the previous section to address some of the concerns and priorities discussed prior. The first and main suggestion was to extend the period for engagement for the development of this Act or implement a second 30-day review period once the GOC has reviewed and incorporated the feedback from all First Nations across the country. Lexical suggestions were also presented, as well as systemic recommendations to support relationships between communities to reduce the capacity requirements on each First Nation. Overall, this report encompasses the thoughts and feedback of First Nations in New Brunswick. The hope is that the content of this report can provide valuable, concrete material to present to GOC for the development of an Act respecting drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on First Nation lands.

NBAFN, continues to work closely with the NSMTC and AFN to address the repealed safe drinking water legislation in Canada. RC Bernard wishes to thank NSMTC, Maggie Stothart and Isabelle Prevost for their perseverance and dedication to this file. The work in addressing the gap in water rights and protection for First Nations is essential and we must continue to voice our priorities, concerns, and recommendations.

As we move forward, our key priorities include securing funding, resources, ownership of First Nations data, involving First Nations leadership, capacity requirements, and implementing succession planning.

A large, stylized blue water drop graphic is centered on the page. Inside the drop, there is text in a dark blue font. The text reads: "We must always remember the message from our Knowledge Keepers that:"

We must  
always remember  
the message from our  
Knowledge Keepers that:

“Water is sacred to all  
peoples and must be  
protected.”



Act Respecting Drinking Water, Wastewater and Related Infrastructure on First Nation Lands - Engagement Session - Feb 21, 2023



Act Respecting Drinking Water, Wastewater and Related Infrastructure on First Nation Lands - Engagement Session - Feb 21, 2023





# Climate Change

A Regional Climate Change Summit was held on June 12th and 13th, 2023. This summit was organized to initiate conversations and thoughts regarding climate change and its impact on First Nations in the New Brunswick region. Speakers from the NorthShore Mi'kmaq District Council, the Climate Change Secretariat of the Government of New Brunswick, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Énergie NB Power, and L'Nu Energy Inc. presented several topics related to climate change, such as anticipated and current impacts, risk assessments, provincial goals and plans, green energies and Small Modular Reactors, and others.

More importantly, this event was grounded in ceremony – a sacred fire was lit in the mornings, and opening prayers helped guide and ground the participants. Traditional foods, such as cedar-plank smoked salmon, bannock and fiddleheads, as well as mushroom chowder and roasted corn and squash were all essential elements of the menu for the event. The location, Four Nature Resort, located on 150 acres of forestry beside the city of Miramichi, allowed for attendees to go fishing or walk the trails that extend throughout the venue. The feedback from the participants was clear – having important discussions in such an environment allowed for more connection with the land and water as opposed to a venue in the city. From this experience, we highly recommend exploring this option as a possibility for future AFN events.

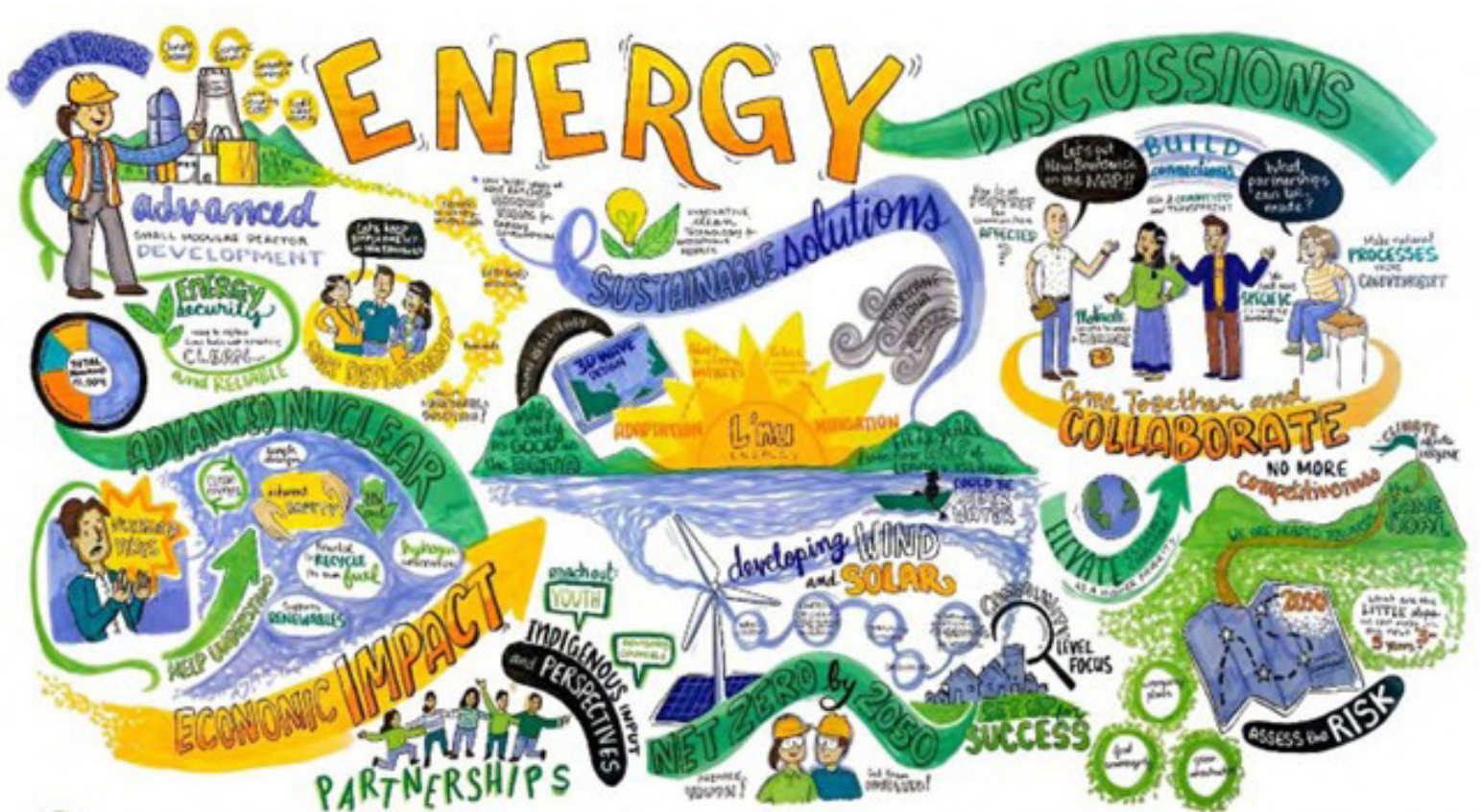
One of the main recommendations from the conversations of the event was to continue such important discussions, to promote collaboration between First Nations and organizations. Therefore, the suggestion was made to organize a set of mini summits, each only one day in length, with more focused topics and open to all interested First Nations and affiliated organizations. The idea is to organize one mini-summit green energies and climate change, one on infrastructure and climate change, one on forestry and climate change, and one on food sovereignty and climate change. By having this set of focused, specified topics, this may facilitate communications with Chief and Council members, and ensure that the staff who work in said fields are aware that such an event is available for them. However, by leaving it open others are able to join as well, such as emergency management employees, as they may find that their daily activities are affected by many of the topics discussed above, and more.

Another recommendation for future events was to organize a traditional seed exchange as a way to promote communication and collaboration. Exchanging seeds such as tobacco, ash, corn, and others, can not only aid in food sovereignty and cultural strength, but also in nourishing relationships. As was discussed during this event, having First Nations supporting one another will be critical in the adaptation and mitigation of climate change.





NBAFN also supported the 2nd Annual Indigenous-Led Energy Symposium, hosted by North Shore Mi'kmaq District Council on October 24-26, 2023, in Moncton, NB. The Symposium brought leaders from First Nation communities, utility companies, government, and industry professionals to participate in two days of dialogue. The focus of the Symposium was the “Three Horizons of Opportunities” in the energy sector, including opportunities that exist today, opportunities that are on the near-future horizon, and future opportunities. The Symposium explored each of these horizons, highlighted disruptive technologies that are poised to contribute to the net-zero pathway, and created an environment for two-way dialogue on Indigenous involvement opportunities.





# First Nations Child and Family Services Long-Term Care Reform

In the fall of 2022, the Assembly of First Nations invited AFN Regions to undertake engagement with First Nations to inform the AFN's discussions towards a final settlement agreement on long-term reform. On November 15, 16, and 17, 2022, the Atlantic Regional Chief's Office met with Child and Family Services and Jordan's Principle Initiative representatives from First Nations in New Brunswick. The participants outlined our vision for long-term reform, identified barriers and challenges with the status quo, proposed solutions, suggested avenues for more comprehensive engagement, and recommended factors that should be considered in the funding formula so that funds are appropriate to local needs.

During discussion, participants repeatedly argued that compensation and long-term reform should be separated to reduce confusion. We agreed that revision of long-term reform is needed but the process should be slowed down. Moreover, people who have been through the 'system' should be engaged because they can provide specialized insight.

Participants spoke about the need for First Nations to speak with one voice and build unity. Divisive strategies used by ISC and other government agencies must stop. Processes must be developed with the full inclusion of First Nations and with a recognition that First Nations know ourselves and our communities best and should therefore lead.

Our ultimate goal is for self-determination with First Nations having control over funding and services. First Nations have the authority and expertise to create a system that is First Nation controlled. As Elder Paul Milliea (Elsipogtog First Nation) reminds us: "All actions should be assessed by whether they are ultimately good for all of Creation". In fulfilling our self-determination, participants clearly described what long-term reform should look like:

First Nations lead and make our own decisions. Governments respect the decisions First Nations make. Every First Nations agency has the resources it needs to service our children at its disposal. The financial resources are there, without caps, without hinderances, and without delay. First Nations have the required training and capacity. There is pay equity; First Nations staff are paid on par with other non-Indigenous colleagues in their field. Services are delivered to our children by First Nation professionals. Elders and traditional services are recognized and are remunerated appropriately. Our languages are strong.

The participants therefore call on the Assembly of First Nations, government and other parties to properly engage First Nations, be inclusive, and work collectively and respectfully to bring this vision to light. The well-being of our children, families, and communities are at stake.



# First Nation Child and Family Services Compensation Package

In October 2023, the Federal Court of Canada approved the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS), Jordan's Principle, Trout and Kith Class Settlement Agreement. This agreement was reached between the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Moushoom and Trout class actions plaintiffs and Canada, with the support from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society.

The agreement included a total of \$23.34 billion in compensation for First Nations children and families who were harmed by the discriminatory underfunding of the FNCFS program and those impacted by the federal government's narrow definition of Jordan's Principle.

This was a very important milestone in the process towards compensating First Nations children and families for the harms they suffered. This agreement could not have been reached without the hard work of the AFN, Parties, and First Nations leadership, who never wavered in their dedication and determination that First Nations children and families receive compensation. I thank the representative plaintiffs for their strength throughout these proceedings, as they are long overdue for an acknowledgement of the harms experienced. There is still much work to do to ensure these discriminatory practices never happen again, and I thank all those involved for their continued efforts on behalf of our communities.



## First Nations Policing as an Essential Service

The project was introduced to the First Nation Chiefs of New Brunswick during their Annual General Assembly in Moncton on Oct. 12, 2022. A presentation was delivered which outlined the background of the anticipated engagement process, how it was envisioned to be undertaken, the various types of participants/organizations who were expected to provide input, and the hoped for results.

The question and answer session which followed the presentation helped further refine the engagement process approach. A facilitator was retained to design and undertake the engagement process and document the results.

First Nation Chiefs and representative organizations (Mawiw Council Inc. the Mi'gmawe'l Tplu'taqnn Incorporated (MTI), the Wolastoqey Tribal Council Inc.) were invited to attend engagement sessions. Sessions were scheduled as follows:

- January 25, 2023 Crowne Plaza Hotel, Moncton
- February 16, 2023 Crowne Plaza Hotel, Moncton
- February 21, 2023 Crowne Plaza Hotel, Moncton
- February 28, 2023 Hilton Garden Inn, Fredericton

Because of the involvement of the Tribal Councils, there was a high level of community participation. The February 16th session, in particular, was unique in that it brought together a cadre of community security officers, RCMP members, retired RCMP members, emergency management coordinators, peacekeeper coordinators and others who have first-hand experience with First Nation policing and delivering policing/security services in their communities.





During the focus groups, participants consistently maintained that while deeming First Nation policing as an essential service is absolutely necessary, the focus has to be broader and centre around justice as a whole, with policing as but one aspect of community wellness and safety.

Parallel to this, it was also acknowledged that our people are over representative in prisons and the justice system overall. We have to give careful contemplation to the aftermath of how we can best serve our community members within our communities. There is a bigger picture and context that has to be considered as well. Community members require support not only when they are in the justice system but also beforehand, in terms of prevention, and afterwards, in terms of support and to reduce recidivism.

Key issues will have to be addressed. Most notably, funding is a key component. Training, infrastructure, vehicles, and ensuring that there is operation and maintenance support for policing as an essential service will all have to be considered.

Finally, each community will have to identify its own needs and its own approach to policing and community safety; one cookie cutter approach will not work for all communities. First Nations want and need to be in control and spearhead community justice with partners acting in a supportive and culturally mindful role. Key to this is ensuring that the First Nations from Atlantic Canada are actively involved in drafting any new legislation. In so doing, New Brunswick First Nations will have the sovereignty with which to grow in our own ways.

*“Water is Life; Water is health.”*



# Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)





# NBAFN Chiefs Meetings

**November 23, 2022** – Maqiyahitimok Center, St. Marys First Nation

**January 25th, 2023** – Crown Plaza, Moncton, NB

**March 14th, 2023** – Rodd Mirimichi Resort, NB

**April 4th, 5th & 6th, 2023** - SCA - Shaw Center, Ottawa

**June 19th** – Atlantic Chiefs HR Investigation Update (virtual)

**June 28th** – SCA Non-Confidence Vote of National Chief Archibald (virtual)

**July 11th, 12th & 13th, 2023** – AGA Halifax, NS

**July 20, 2023** – Virtual meeting

**August 25, 2023** – Virtual Meeting

**November 28, 2023** – AFN Candidates Forum for National Chief

## Other Notable events:

Summer Powwow Trail

*Ugpi'ganjig, Eel River Bar First Nation – August 19, 2023*



*Negotkok, Tobique First Nation – July 19, 2023*



*“Seven Generations!”*

*St Marys Veterans Day Memorial – November 8, 2023*



*Honorary Colonels*





*Remembrance Day Ceremony – Parliament Hill November 11, 2023*



Late Jack Wysote Memorial – August 23, 2023

NB Women in Leadership Conference – November 3, 2023

JEDI AGM – November 8, 2023

Bank of Canada Roundtable with Governor MacKlem – November 22, 2023

Grand Opening of Nignen Shelter – November 30, 2023

## Other Meetings Attended

APC Health Partnerships Meetings

APC Executive Meetings

APC All Chiefs and Council

AFNWA Monthly Board Meetings



# National Portfolios and report of Interim National Chief Joanna Bernard

As Interim National Chief, my priority has been to uphold the rights, interests, and concerns of First Nations, following the guidance of the First Nations-in-Assembly and the AFN Executive Committee, to address the pressing issues facing our communities, and to ensure that the voices of our people are heard and represented effectively.

Part of this important work includes restoring accountability, transparency, and upholding the values that guide our governance within the AFN. With this, I am pleased to present an update on the work completed to date.

## **AFN-INC Work Plan:**

Upon taking office in July 2023, we implemented a 6-month work plan to address outstanding issues at the AFN and move forward on key priorities identified by leadership. These priorities include restoring the stability of the AFN, enhancing transparency in governance, and advancing the mandates set by First Nations-in-Assembly. Under two priority areas, including:

- 1). Championing Workplace Wellness for the AFN Staff and the Organization, and
- 2). Advancing First Nation Mandates,

We identified focus areas such as hiring a CEO, updating AFN policies, implementing the Panel 13 Report recommendations, among others.

## **CEO Hiring:**

To start, we are making progress with the hiring process for the AFN Chief Executive Officer (CEO). I want to acknowledge the diligent efforts of the AFN Hiring Committee, Human Resources, and our partnership with Leaders International. We hope to finalize the selection and onboarding as soon as possible.



## **AFN Policies**

I am pleased to announce that the tasks related to updating the AFN whistle-blower policy, code of conduct, and harassment reporting have been completed. We are also working on a specific code of conduct for event participants, set to be released and promoted at the December 2023 Special Chiefs Assembly (SCA).

## **Panel 13**

We are actively working on implementing the Panel 13 Report recommendations. A work plan has been developed and approved, and we are actively seeking feedback from Councils, Cultural Advisors, and other partners to ensure its effective implementation. We will provide a progress update to First Nations-in-Assembly at the December SCA.

## **Conduct Complaints**

Regarding the outstanding Executive Code of Conduct complaints, nearly all complaints have been resolved, with one remaining issue scheduled to be addressed in December 2023.

## **Audits**

We have developed a work plan and an RFP to engage a consultant for a review of the past ten years of the AFN Audits. While previous attempts to seek quorum and direction from the Chiefs Committee on Charter Renewal remain unsuccessful, we are committed to ensuring the implementation of Resolution 43/2023 and for the AFN to move forward in a good way. As directed by the resolution the last 10 years of audit reports have been posted on the AFN website. A preliminary report on this work will be released at the December SCA.

## **Executive Meetings**

We have been diligently holding meetings to align the objectives of the AFN Executive Committee as mandated by First Nations-in-Assembly. I would like to acknowledge each of your efforts in ensuring respectful collaboration and representation during these meetings. In August, we successfully allocated all portfolio assignments to the Regional Chiefs. To build on this momentum, I am proud to announce that by December 2023, three regions, including Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, without a Regional Chief, will have successfully filled those roles.



## Resolutions

We are moving forward on the resolutions put forth by First Nations-in-Assembly. This work included reviewing the 2022 Resolutions Report, focusing on resolutions with limited progress, and actioning resolutions passed since. While there is much work to be completed, we are pleased with the progress to date and would like to acknowledge the Chiefs, committees, councils, and AFN staff for their work. The 2023 Resolutions Report will be presented at the December 2023 SCA detailing the work completed to date.

## Events/Meetings

I have had the privilege to participate in key events and meetings, both in-person and virtually. Some of these meetings include a meeting with the Governor General, Mary Simon, attending the “One Young World” summit in Belfast, Ireland, with the AFN Youth Council, and a meeting with the UN High Commissioner.



*“Fresh water is sacred and requires protection.”*





# Portfolio work to date:

## Intergovernmental Work

Since July, I've been deeply involved in discussions across various governmental levels, ensuring First Nations' needs, priorities, and perspectives are integrated into Canada's national policy and actions.

Key meetings with cabinet members included:

Telephone conversation with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Discussion included regional multi-year funding, the Manitoba Landfill Search, and the Metis Rights Assertion, among other topics.

Virtual meetings with Minister Gary Anandasangaree (CIRNAC) and Minister Patty Hajdu (ISC) separately, to seek a commitment on AFNs 2024 Pre-Budget Submission's funding priorities, and to discuss closing the infrastructure gap, implementing the UNDA Action Plan, and progress on the health and safe drinking water legislation.

Virtual meeting with Minister Jenna Sudds of the Ministry of Families, Children, and Social Development, to discuss First Nations' rights and jurisdiction over children and families, poverty reduction, and early learning.

Virtual meeting with Minister Virani, Ministry of Justice, where we discussed the development of the Indigenous Justice Strategy and the implementation of the UNDA.

With portfolio holders, Ontario Regional Chief Glen Hare, and Proxy Yukon Regional Chief Mary Jane Jim, a virtual meeting was held with Minister Mark Holland, Ministry of Health. Our dialogue prioritized First Nations' health, access to health services, housing, clean water, mental wellness, and enhancing First Nations-led health initiatives.

During each meeting, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet members were invited to a future AFN Executive Committee meeting, with the intention of Canada strengthening its working relationship with First Nations and making progress on critical priorities for First Nations across the country.

I also had the honour of meeting Canada's Governor General, Mary Simon, alongside other National Indigenous Organization (NIO) leaders. We discussed pressing issues, such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the discovery of unmarked burials at Indian Residential Schools, and progress on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. This meeting highlighted the shared goal of ensuring First Nations' concerns are actively addressed in the national agenda.



## **International Work**

Part of my role is to ensure the voices, concerns, and aspirations of First Nations in Canada are heard at regional, national, and international levels. In September, I attended the Central Bank Network for Indigenous Inclusion Symposium in New Zealand. This event covered crucial issues such as Indigenous financial inclusion, access to capital, Indigenous-led financial approaches, and representation in the financial sector. The event was an opportunity to enhance international partnership and advocacy and advance First Nations priorities on finance and economic development.

I also had the privilege to attend the One Young World Summit in Belfast, Ireland, alongside the AFN Youth Council, further strengthening the global presence and connectivity of First Nations youth leadership.

I also had a meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk. Our discussions included a range of issues, from Canada's UN Declaration Act Action Plan to self-determination, racism, the legacy of Residential Schools, and other First Nations human rights concerns. This meeting allowed us to highlight Canada's human rights commitments and seek the High Commissioner's support for advancing First Nations rights.

I also participated in the Canada-CARICOM Summit Reception in Ottawa. The summit aimed to strengthen the ties for a more collaborative future.

With each meeting and each dialogue my goal was to ensure our message was delivered effectively and that First Nations voices and perspectives are not only heard but upheld and respected.

## **Women's Council**

Part of my responsibility as the Interim National Chief of the AFN is to ensure the voices of our First Nations women are well-represented and advocated for. The AFN Women's Council is a vital organ in achieving this.

In July 2022, a strategic planning process led to the identification of five core priorities for 2022-2025. These priorities encompass a holistic approach, ranging from addressing policies to the promotion of the wellbeing of First Nations children and youth. We were able to provide an update on the Council's strategic plan during the AGA in Halifax. In addition to being an active voice for First Nations women, the AFN Women's Council is leading efforts with the National Caucus of Women Leaders, as mandated by resolution, with the co-chairs of the National Caucus of Women Leaders also being members of the AFN Women's Council.



### **The AFN Women's Council:**

On October 26, a joint session with the AFN 2SLGBTQIA+ Council. Discussion included mutual priorities, including the GBA+ Framework, the MMIWG2S+ Roundtable, and more. On October 27, the AFN Women's Council regrouped to discuss internal matters. This included the selection of our Vice-Chairperson, portfolios, the National Caucus of Women Leaders, and other discussions. These meetings provided an opportunity for open dialogue, ensuring our path forward aligns with the needs and perspectives of First Nations women. While there are two current vacancies within the AFN Women's Council for Nova Scotia and PEI, I look forward to these roles being filled soon.

### **Lands, Territories and Resources:**

Following the appointment of the former Regional Chief of Nova Scotia, Paul Prosper, to the Senate of Canada in July, I assumed the responsibility of overseeing the initiatives under the Lands, Territories, and Resources portfolio. We have been moving forward in areas such as Additions to Reserve (ATR) reform, Specific Claims, and advancing rights implementation through UN Declaration Action Plan.

Since 2022, we have been working collaboratively with the Government of Canada to co-develop options to create a fully Independent Centre for the Resolution of Specific Claims. While we are making progress, we need to continue pushing our counterparts to ensure this work remains a priority. We can deliver fundamental reform during this Government's mandate if we remain committed.

Additions to Reserve reform remains a key priority. The current ATR process positions First Nations to fail – consistently prioritizing risk management and third-party interests over our need for lands. We have recently learned that Crown-Indigenous Relations is committed to reframing the ATR process and will work together with the AFN and First Nations on a new policy framework that prioritizes First Nations goals.

### **Language**

- Access to Adequate, Sustainable, Long-term Funding

Budget 2021 funding is coming to an end next fiscal. This budget provided an important top-up to ongoing language funding for First Nations-led language initiatives. It is also the only source of funding for language agreements. Without a budget renewal, First Nations will be faced with a devastating cut in available funding, and gradually lose the ability to enter into language agreements with the government. We need to work together to push the federal government to commit to additional funding in the next Budget Announcement. The AFN estimates that approximately \$3.8B is required over the next 5 years.

- **Revised Regional Allocation Formula for Languages Funding**

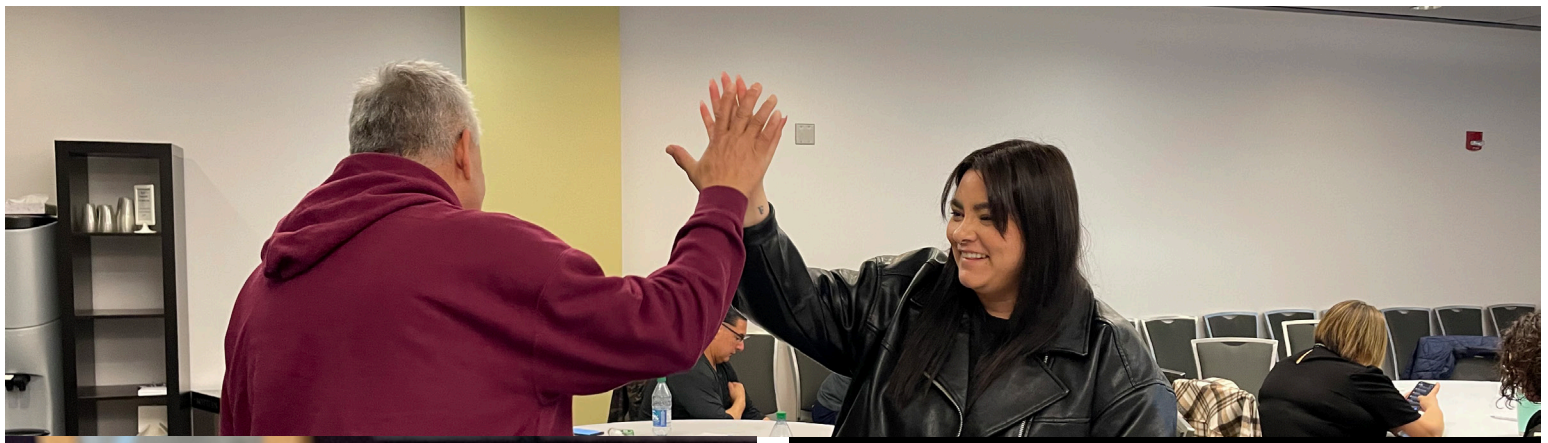
The Government of Canada's current Regional Allocation Formula was developed unilaterally. On October 5, the Chiefs Committee on Languages put forward a recommendation that the Technical

Committee on Languages work within their regions to develop weighting options for a revised Regional Allocation Formula. The aim is to come together in March 2024 to develop a consensus on a way forward with the allocation formula to ensure all regions are supported equitably in their language revitalization efforts. The AFN Languages and Learning Sector can provide support to regions in this process as required.

- **Nominations for the Global Task Force for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages**

A Global Task Force was developed to support the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Regional Indigenous Organizations have been invited to put nominations forward to ensure representation at the international level. Other regional Indigenous Organizations have representation on the Global Task Force. The Chiefs Committee on Languages and Technical Committee on Languages worked with the AFN to develop a list of nominees.

Nominations are due to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) by December 7, 2023. The Executive Committee is being asked to review the nomination list and recommend a nominee as soon as possible. The AFN will communicate the chosen nominee to UNESCO.





## The Path Moving Forward

Moving forward, the NBAFN will continue to address the critical issues facing First Nations in New Brunswick. Our focus areas include environmental concerns, nature and climate change, women and gender equality, safe drinking water, and long-term reform of First Nations child and family services. I will continue to support First Nations leadership in New Brunswick, especially as they continue to navigate their relationship with the provincial government. The Chiefs of New Brunswick continue to affirm their willingness to cooperate with all levels of government and we will stand united in ensuring healthy and safe communities and the protection our future generations.

## Conclusion

The past year has been a period filled with invaluable learning, training, and attending many meetings. I wish to thank the AFN Staff and AFN Executive Committee for their commitment and dedication in advocating for all First Nations. Chief Rebecca Knockwood and all the NBAFN Chiefs for their support. I look forward to continuing to serve the New Brunswick region and advancing our priorities and our shared goal of creating a brighter future for our communities!

Woliwon/Wela'lin, Merci, Thank you

*“Nothing About Us Without US!”*

- Regional Chief Joanna Bernard



New Brunswick Regional Office of AFN