



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

*MOVING
FORWARD
TOGETHER
IN UNITY*

Regional Chief Joanna Bernard
NB AFN



‘Qey/‘Kwey,

I begin by acknowledging that we are gathering on the unceded and unsundered Wolastoqey/Mi’kmaq/Peskotomuhkati territory whose presence dates back to time immemorial.

Thank you for your unwavering trust and support. Your leadership and dedication continue to shape a positive path forward for our communities, and I remain deeply grateful for the trust you place in me.

It is my honor to present my annual report to you, at the New Brunswick Assembly of First Nations Chiefs meetings. This year, we reaffirm our commitment to advocacy on a broad spectrum of critical issues while giving special emphasis to the enduring priorities that will define our future.

Jordan’s Principle and Long-Term Care Reform

We will persist in advancing Jordan’s Principle to ensure every child receives timely access to essential services without delay

or bureaucratic barriers. In parallel, we will advocate for comprehensive long-term care reform that honors dignity, respects cultural needs, and delivers high-quality care within our communities.

Safety and Security within First Nations

NBAFN’s work will continue to advocate for strengthened community safety, reduced violence, and improved access to protective services. We will pursue collaborative, culturally informed approaches that will empower families, support survivors, and build safer, more resilient communities.

Economic Reconciliation

NBAFN will push for policies and partnerships that promote meaningful economic opportunities, workforce development, and inclusive growth. By prioritizing resource equity, capacity building, and Indigenous-led enterprises, NBAFN aims to promote sustainable prosperity that benefits all members of our nations. Throughout all these efforts, we remain dedicated to advocating for the issues that matter most to our people, guided by our shared values and long-term vision. Our advocacy will be persistent, principled, and principled in service of justice, respect, and opportunity for every member.

Unity

We Are Stronger Together! In unity, there is strength and as we stand together—First Nations communities, leaders, and partners—we amplify our collective voice, expand our reach, and accelerate meaningful change. Collaboration fosters innovation, resilience, and accountability, allowing us to address complex challenges with shared purpose. By linking our efforts across communities and sectors, we can overcome barriers, celebrate our diversity, and build a future where every member benefits from safety, dignity, and opportunity. We are stronger together, and together we will shape a brighter future for our nations. Thank you for your continued trust and collaboration as we advance these priorities in the year ahead.

Woliwon/Wela’lin



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Chief Rebecca Knockwood
Amlamgog Nation
(Fort Folly First Nation)



Chief Gabriel Atwin
Bilijk First Nation
(Kingsclear First Nation)



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Lisa Tomah
Executive Assistant



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Regional Key Issues and Activities:

NBAFN Strategic Plan

In March 2025, Regional Chief, Joanna Bernard, gathered the New Brunswick Assembly of First Nations (NBAFN) Chiefs. One of the leadership's key activities was to lay out key priorities and a strategic action plan to guide the work of the Regional Chief and the NBAFN for the Regional Chief's term of office, which ends November 2027.

Throughout the AGA, the leadership discussed several key issues and designated key action items for uptake. The process of identifying actions allowed the Chiefs of New Brunswick First Nations to be intentional about their priorities. In turn, the process also provided a mandate to the Regional Chief moving forward and ensured that resources could be set aside or sought to support implementation.

The strategic action plan set forward was a reflection of this process and the articulation of the priorities of the leadership. It set a direction through the identification of key activities to support the NBAFN's key priority of fostering unity among New Brunswick First Nations and to move the yardstick along multiple issues to ensure that First Nation priorities and issues are at the forefront.



The following strategic priority areas were identified:

Unity
Jordan's Principle
Policing
Human Trafficking
Health
Energy

Safe Drinking Water

NB Regional Chief Joanna Bernard appointed Maggie Stothart, P.Eng., as the Regional Water Coordinator (RWC) for New Brunswick on December 6, 2022, during the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly held in Ottawa. Maggie is a Professional Engineer registered with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of New Brunswick and has been part of the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council since 2017, working as a technical advisor on infrastructure projects across member First Nations.

The role of the RWC is to ensure New Brunswick's active participation in national water initiatives and to share regional updates, priorities, and opportunities with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). The RWC attends meetings, conferences, and engagement sessions, reporting back to the Regional Chief on activities that support and advance water projects for First Nations in the province.

Over this fiscal year, the RWC has participated in monthly RWC meetings, quarterly CCoHI meetings, the AFN Annual General Assembly, and the AFN Water Symposium. A major focus this year has been Bill C-61, An Act Respecting Water, Source Water, Wastewater and Related Infrastructure on First Nation Lands. AFN NB has hosted three engagement sessions focused on Bill C-61 and other water-related projects in the region, with findings reported back to AFN. Planning is underway for a fourth engagement session to be held in winter 2026.

The regional engagement sessions have helped to identify growing capacity challenges for those working directly in water infrastructure. Many consultants are at full capacity, driving up costs and stretching project budgets. These higher costs take away from the real work that needs to be done in our communities. Too often, funding becomes tied up in overhead and unnecessary studies rather than supporting on-the-ground progress.

First Nations are growing both residentially and commercially, and succession planning for safe and sustainable water systems needs to be built into every program and project moving forward. Water is life,

and continued collaboration and investments are key to ensuring every First Nation in New Brunswick has access to safe, reliable water now and for generations to come.

AFN NB welcomes feedback on this report. The Regional Water Coordinator is available to support information sharing among Chiefs, Councillors, Leaders, Directors, Managers, and Operators across the region.



Bert Babineau from Buctouche Micmac Band receiving Operator of the Year Award.



Attendees at the AFN NB 3rd Annual Samqwan Mawio'mi held within Wolastoqey territory.

Esgenoopeitj Operator Raine Somerville
completing hydrant maintenance.



Climate Change

NBAFN, once again, proudly sponsored NSMTC in the 4th Annual NSMTC Energy Symposium. The 2025 Atlantic Indigenous-Led Energy Symposium took place October 28-30th, 2025 at the Delta Hotels by Marriott Beasejour in Moncton, New Brunswick. Under the theme “Protecting Mother Earth, Powering Future Generations”, NSMTC continued vital discussions on clean energy, environmental stewardship, and the role of Indigenous leadership in shaping a more sustainable future. This Symposium also examined energy as both a resource and a responsibility, emphasizing its deep connection to land, water, air, and community well-being. Leaders from within the energy, finance, public policy and environmental stewardship sectors explored strategies that balance economic growth with cultural and ecological integrity – ensuring a cleaner, more resilient future for the next seven generations.



Nature Table

On March 25th

- Discussion on Glyphosate and Health Concerns

The need to investigate the relationship between glyphosate and an unknown disease was highlighted, noting the widespread use of glyphosate by major institutions. A plan was proposed to assess community health, suggesting pilot testing for exposure levels. It was added that there is evidence of patients with high levels of heavy metals, including arsenic, and a call for government involvement in investigating these health issues was made. Chief George expressed concerns about high levels of metals in the Eel River Bar due to historical industrial activities, advocating for studies to assess the health risks associated with local food sources. A Resolution was drafted and put forward to the Chiefs.

**Moved by: Chief Ross Perley and
Seconded by Chief Gabriel Atwin**

Since March 2025 the patient representatives and the patient advocate (Kat Lanteigne) have written several letters. A patient meeting was held with Premier Holt and Minister Dornan at the end of March. From there, the patients selected two patient representatives to liaise with the Premier and Minister (Sarah Nesbitt and Stacie Quigley Cormier).

There was one follow up meeting with the Premier and Minister in May and since then, there has been no response from the province despite our repeated requests for a follow up.

In May, a study was released by a neurologist in Toronto with several NB co-researchers. They concluded that there is no new disease in NB. However, their sample size is very small and they used data without consent. There are many problems with this article. It was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The timing of the article is highly suspect and there is question about the connection between various provincial players and the researchers.

In May, the province also announced that it would use the enhanced reports that Dr. Marrero completed and submit aggregated data to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Despite repeated requests, the province refused to submit the raw data. The province is essentially duplicating the process it undertook with its 2022 report where it also concluded that there is no neurological disease.

However, the question of whether there is a new disease is academic and not the focus. The reality is that an increasing number of people continue to become ill. We continue to lobby for an independent scientific inquiry into the potential causes but there is a staunch refusal to consider causes. The focus should not be on whether there is a new disease but on ***what is making people sick.***

There continue to be First Nations patients. We do not have access to the numbers because of confidentiality, but due to close knit community ties, we know of several First Nations patients. In Tantramar, which includes Fort Folly, there are an alarming number of new cases. The results are alarming! For example, one patient from the region has manganese levels upwards of 6500 nmol. For context, the maximum tolerable level is about 20nmol - theirs is 6500!

The reality is that this problem affects all of us but especially people who live near waterways and who eat country food - that makes First Nations more vulnerable.





First Nations Child and Family Services Long-Term Care Reform

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has reached a final settlement agreement for compensation related to the First Nations Child and Family Services program and Jordan's Principle, which has been approved by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and the Federal Court. However, work on long-term reform continues, now overseen by the National Children's Chiefs Commission (NCCC), which was formed because the AFN's previous draft agreement on reform was not ratified. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal continues to issue rulings on the implementation of Jordan's Principle, including an August 2025 ruling on long-term reform and a November 2024 ruling addressing backlogs.

Compensation settlement

- **Final agreement:** A \$23.3 billion final settlement agreement was reached in April 2023 to compensate for discrimination under the First Nations Child and Family Services program and the narrow interpretation of Jordan's Principle.
- **Compensation eligibility:** This agreement includes compensation for children removed from their homes and First Nations children impacted by the narrow definition of Jordan's Principle between specific dates.
- **Tribunal and Court approval:** The settlement received final approval from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in July 2023 and the Federal Court in October 2023.
- **Claims process:** The claims process for this compensation is now open.

Long-term reform

- **New negotiator:** The AFN's efforts on long-term reform have transitioned to the National Children's Chiefs Commission (NCCC), which was formed in December 2024 to negotiate a new agreement on behalf of First Nations chiefs.
- **AFN approval:** The NCCC's mandate stems from resolutions passed by the First Nations-in-Assembly in 2024, which directed the new negotiation process after a draft agreement on long-term reform was not ratified by the AFN.
- **Tribunal oversight:** While the NCCC negotiates the new reform agreement, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal continues to oversee the implementation of Jordan's Principle and has issued new rulings on long-term reform.

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) involvement

- **Ongoing rulings:** The CHRT continues to issue rulings on the case, including a ruling in August 2025 on the National First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) long-term reform and a ruling in January 2025 that provided full reasons for its November 2024 summary ruling on Jordan's Principle implementation.
- **Focus on implementation:** In November 2024, the Tribunal ordered Canada to consult with First Nations groups on addressing backlogs in Jordan's Principle requests.
- **Backlog:** The Tribunal noted in November 2024 that the backlogged requests "may very well be urgent" and directed Canada to work on interim solutions.

First Nations Safety and Security

On July 28th, 2025 NBAFN Chiefs met with RCMP representatives. It was announced that New Brunswick is establishing a new RCMP sexual violence investigative unit to address high rates of sexual assault and human trafficking. The unit, which will have offices across the province, will provide specialized, trauma-informed training to officers to improve investigations and support for survivors. The first office will open in Shediac at the Courage Centre, and other locations will include Oromocto and Tracadie.

*The new units will primarily affect First Nations by aiming to provide **more specialized and trauma-informed services** and by attempting to bridge existing gaps through the creation of dedicated Indigenous support roles and community partnerships, while acknowledging the profound historical mistrust in the justice system.*

Key potential effects and considerations include:

- *Increased specialized support: The units will be staffed by specially-trained RCMP officers who will focus on severe and complex sexual violence cases, with training in trauma-informed interviewing techniques, which can be beneficial for victims from all communities, including First Nations.*
- *Addressing systemic barriers: The New Brunswick government's approach, outlined in documents like "Weaving Our Voices Together", acknowledges the need to address the historical trauma and mistrust in the justice system among Indigenous populations, which often deters victims from reporting violence.*
- *Culturally relevant resources: Specific initiatives have been mentioned in provincial action plans to provide culturally appropriate services, such as:*
 - o *The creation of an Indigenous Sexual Violence Coordinator position at Sexual Violence New Brunswick to build capacity within Indigenous communities.*
 - o *An Indigenous Senior Consultant position hired within the provincial Victim Services program to identify needs and bridge gaps.*
 - o *Specialized training for Indigenous domestic violence outreach workers and staff at shelters, including the Nignen Women's Shelter (the first in a NB Indigenous community).*
- *Improved access and outreach: The development of a directory of services for victims in First Nations communities and the implementation of an Aboriginal Domestic Violence Outreach Program in northern New Brunswick are intended to improve awareness and access to resources.*
- *Enhanced community collaboration: The province has engaged with Indigenous community members to identify priorities and facilitate dialogue on addressing the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The new units are part of a broader strategy that emphasizes collaboration with community partners.*

However, the units' success for First Nations communities will largely depend on the effective implementation of these culturally specific initiatives and ongoing, meaningful collaboration with Wabanaki Nations and Indigenous organizations to ensure the services are truly culturally safe and address the unique needs rooted in intergenerational trauma and systemic issues.

Elder Edward Perley





National Portfolio – Economic Development

Labour Market

The Economic Development sector is supporting the First Nations, Indigenous Skills, Employment & Training Program agreement holders, focusing on engagement, partnerships, labour market information, and Employment and Social Development Canada policy and program issues.

Natural Resources

The AFN is working towards further advancing First Nations participation at all levels of decision making regarding Natural Resources Canada's program and policy areas. The Economic Development sector will host a Natural Resource Forum in March 2025 to discuss critical priorities relating to regulatory coordination, First Nations partnerships, natural resource economic policy and program delivery.

Trade

The AFN is working on expanding trade-related economic opportunities and market access for First Nations goods and services internationally and between Nations. Focusing on the development and inclusion of Indigenous-specific sections/chapters in the Central Bank Network for Indigenous Inclusion, Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement.

Cannabis

The AFN is advocating for the Government of Canada to work with First Nations to implement the recommendations outlined by the Expert Panel in the Cannabis Act legislation to support First Nations participation in the Cannabis sector.

Gaming

The AFN is monitoring the progress of Bill S-268 An Act to Amend the Criminal Code and the Indian Act, which proposes similar amendments as Resolution 18/2022 to affirm First Nations jurisdiction over gaming. The AFN is developing a legal analysis of the bill as part of AFN's advocacy on Bill S-268.

Procurement

The AFN is supporting the creation of a First Nations-led Procurement Organization as mandated by Resolution 72/2023, First Nations-Led Procurement Organization. The FNPO will maximize procurement opportunities and outcomes for First Nations businesses and communities by advocating for improvements and access.



Connectivity

The AFN continues to advocate for First Nations access to spectrum and the call for a moratorium on spectrum licensing in service areas above First Nations. Meaningful consultations with First Nations on licensing processes is required to ensure consistency with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Moving Forward

The AFN Economic Development Sector plans to host a National Forum on natural resources to bring together First Nations leaders and technical experts, senior government officials and industry to discuss priorities and issues relating to the natural resource sector.

Other Notable events:

March 25th – 26th NBAFN Chiefs Meeting



July 27th – Presentations of King Coronation Medals



July 28th – NBAFN Chiefs Meetings



AGA Winnipeg – Sept 3rd – 5th





Indigenous Leadership Summit at Eel River Bar First Nation – January 15th – 17th

Health Partnership Meetings – January 29th and 30th

National Natural Resources Forum – March 12th and 13th, 2025

Weso'tmk Mawio'mi – March 19th, 2025

JEDI 30th Anniversary Celebration – June 25th and 26th

First Nations Economic Reconciliation Summit 2025 – July 17th, 2025



The Path Ahead and Looking Forward

Moving forward, the NBAFN will continue to address the critical issues facing First Nations in New Brunswick. Our focus areas include policing, environmental concerns, nature and climate change, 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 of our future generations.





New Brunswick Regional Office of AFN