

POLITICAL OFFICE:
Fort William First Nation
R.R. #4
Suite 101, 90 Anemki Drive
Fort William First Nation Office Complex
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7J 1A5
(807) 626 9339
(807) 626 9404 Fax



ADMINISTRATION OFFICE:
111 Peter Street, Suite 804
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 2H1
Tel: (416) 597-1266
Fax (416) 597-8365
1-877-517-6527
Website: www.chiefs-of-ontario.org

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

ONTARIO ANNOUNCES INITIAL INVESTMENT IN ABORIGINAL RELATIONSHIP FUND

May 20, 2008 - On May 15, 2008 at Queen's Park, Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Michael Bryant announced an initial investment of \$25 million over two years for what is being described as a New Relationship Fund to support "First Nations and Métis communities to enhance their consultation capacity to participate in meaningful consultations with government and the private sector on important land, resource and other development initiatives" (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs Backgrounder). The other purpose of this new Fund involves supporting increased skills development and building business partnerships and is open to "Aboriginal individuals, organizations and First Nations and Métis communities". The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs did not announce any additional details beyond what was presented by Minister Bryant. He indicated that the details will be worked out following consultations with the First Nations and the Métis over the upcoming months.

"I view this initial investment of \$25 million as only a beginning in terms of addressing the actual capacity needs that exist within our communities. Clearly this amount of money falls far short" stated Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse. The Regional Chief indicated that Minister Bryant has made a commitment to secure a larger investment in the near future. Regional Chief Toulouse expressed his belief that there is a general lack of understanding of what the true capacity needs of First Nations are within government and the general public.

Regional Chief Toulouse indicated that First Nations are opposed to the Fund being set up as a pan-aboriginal fund. He explained that the term "aboriginal" is very misleading, and is a term used to encompass the three constitutionally recognized Indigenous groups in Canada — the First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit. "We are very diverse peoples. There are critical distinctions between us including the fact that First Nations people occupy their traditional territories, and we have signed treaties with the Crown. This makes us very unique and we expect to be dealt with on a distinct basis" said Regional Chief Toulouse.

Minister Bryant stated that the creation of an Aboriginal Fund was a recommendation of Justice Sidney Linden in the Final Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry released in May 2007. Regional Chief Toulouse indicated that this was in fact a key recommendation, however, what Justice Linden recommended and what First Nations supported, was the creation of a Reconciliation Fund similar to the New Relationship Trust announced in British Columbia (BC) in 2005. At that time, the BC government announced an investment of \$100 million for a First Nation-specific Relationship Trust. "Although what Ontario announced today is a positive first step in terms of beginning to recognize the significant capacity needs within First Nations communities — it is not sufficient and is not what First Nations envisioned and advocated" stated Regional Chief Toulouse.

Regional Chief Toulouse explained that the stated purposes of the new Fund were not derived from any joint decision-making process between First Nations and Ontario. "Our joint discussions were very preliminary, in fact only one meeting occurred on April 4, 2008 between First Nations political leadership and Minister Bryant. The decision to proceed in this manner and this quickly was a unilateral decision made by the government of Ontario and goes against the process that we agreed to follow" said the Regional Chief.

"The Ipperwash Report is about making a fundamental shift in the First Nations and government relationship. It is about doing business differently — not the old way of government taking an idea and implementing it how government sees fit with little to no dialogue with First Nations" stated the Regional Chief. He further stated that First Nations are expecting Ontario to honour the spirit and intent of the Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry and move forward in implementing the remaining recommendations in a manner that is transparent in the sharing of information and decision-making.

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For more information please contact:

Pam Hunter
Policy Advisor

(416) 597-1266 or
(613) 203-3233