

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



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June 29, 2021

Honourable Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
PO Box 9010 Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Honourable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources Operations & Rural Development
PO Box 9352 Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8W 2H1

Honourable Marc Miller
Minister Indigenous Services Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Honourable Catherine McKenna
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
Suite 1100, 180 Kent Street
Ottawa, ON K1P 0B6

Dear Ministers,

Re: Addressing First Nation Emergency Management Funding and Application Processes

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is extremely concerned about the continued disparities faced by BC First Nations in emergency management matters within their communities. First Nation (FN) governments face inequity in the funding and associated application processes regarding federal and provincial funding proposals for emergency management activities including understanding disaster risk, governance, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. FN governments that already lack resources in this area are forced to compete with municipal and local governments, and public sector organizations, many of whom are very familiar and experienced in obtaining funding dollars. FNLC seeks to co-develop a strategy for the deployment of emergency management funds and resources in BC.

The creation of onerous, burdensome, and complicated funding application processes requires extensive work by First Nations that are already operating at maximum capacity within their administrations. In addition, in meetings with FNLC, BC officials have also articulated their own frustration with the varied and often bureaucratic application processes, as recently as May 13, 2021. FNs continue to sound the alarm to the disparities they face in emergency management. They struggle to compete for dollars against entities that have the required experience, personnel, and budgets to put forward extensive funding proposals, resulting in little success in acquiring the funding needed to have successful, on-going emergency management programs.

As you know, Emergency Management BC (EMBC) entered into the Emergency Management Services Agreement with Canada as represented by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure in 2017. The Agreement is intended to ensure that FN communities receive emergency management services that are comparable or equal to those received by neighboring off-reserve communities. The preamble of the Agreement articulates; *“Canada wishes the Province to provide equivalent emergency management services, including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to the jurisdictions of Lands set apart by Canada for the use and benefit of Indian bands to protect Lands and assets as well as key public environmental values.”*

British Columbia and Canada have adopted the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai). Article 24 (h) of Sendai states: *To ensure the use of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge and practices, as appropriate, to complement scientific knowledge in disaster risk assessment and the development and implementation of policies, strategies, plans and programmes of specific sectors, with a cross-sectoral approach, which should be tailored to localities and to the context;* Further, Article 27 (h) states: *To empower local authorities, as appropriate, through regulatory and financial means to work and coordinate with civil society, communities and indigenous peoples and migrants in disaster risk management at the local level;*

Further, on April 29, 2019, collectively we signed the Emergency Management Services Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Purpose of the MOU states: *The purpose of this MOU is to establish a process whereby the parties can work collectively to advance meaningful recognition and enhanced capacity of First Nations within all pillars of emergency management (i.e., preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery).*

Some of the Goals include:

- *Canada’s evolving system of cooperative federalism and distinct orders of government, consistent with section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, the UN Declaration and with reference to the TRC Calls to Action and other pivotal sources of guidance, and which includes the recognition and implementation of Aboriginal, treaty and Indigenous human rights and the recognition of the inherent jurisdiction and legal orders of Indigenous nations.*
- *that meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples aims to secure their free, prior, and informed consent before Crown actions occur that may impact their rights, including their lands, territories, and resources, and recognizes the right of First Nations people to participate in decision-making in matters which affect their rights, through their own representative institutions;*
- *that Canada and the Province have a legal duty to consult with Indigenous peoples prior to making decisions or taking actions which may adversely impact the rights of Indigenous peoples, including their lands, territories and resources;*

There are enough guiding documents and agreements in place for the purpose of addressing the lack of resourcing and capacity, yet there seems to be little in the way of improvement of FN emergency management. As this year’s wildfire season is upon us, there is opportunity for FNs to benefit immediately from access to resources and capacity development in all areas of emergency management and to see measurable change as set forth by these guiding documents and agreements.

In order to address this inequity, sufficient funding opportunities must be created that are specific to FN governments, which would provide more opportunity for successful funding applications and would continue to build capacity in emergency management for FN


communities. This would result in a coordinated effort to direct funding to FN communities with the support of the FN Emergency Management Coordinators in place and fulfilling empty positions in other FNs without one.

We further request that grant application and reporting processes be restructured in consultation with FN governments to ensure the ongoing gaps in services and funding are addressed from the perspective of those it is meant to serve.

We are looking forward to receiving your earliest response on this matter.

Sincerely,
FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

On behalf of the FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT


Cheryl Casimer


Robert Phillips


Lydia Hwitsum

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS


Grand Chief Stewart Phillip


Chief Don Tom


Kukpi7 Judy Wilson

On behalf of the BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:


Regional Chief Terry Teegee

Cc: Hon. Murray Rankin, MIRR
Hon. Carolyn Bennett, CIRNA
Bill Guerin, A/RDG, ISC BC Region