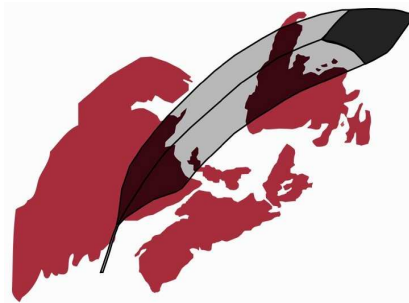


**The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs Secretariat Inc.**

# **Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance**



Contact Person: **John Paul, Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs,**  
[john.paul@apcfn.ca](mailto:john.paul@apcfn.ca); 1-877-667-4007; (902) 435-8021 phone  
(902) 435-8027 fax

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The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs Secretariat Inc. is a non-profit organization federally incorporated in 1995 which acts as the collective voice of 36 Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy First Nation Chiefs living in their traditional territories which is now known as Atlantic Canada, the Gaspé region in Quebec and southeastern Maine, USA. Our organization's mandate is to 'research, analyze and develop alternatives to federal policies' that affect its members' communities. Currently, our most urgent policy priorities are Housing/Infrastructure, Health Care, Economic Development, Education and Social Program Reform.

Our Strengths are our people, language, culture, Aboriginal and Treaty rights as well as our young and rapidly growing population. Our Treaties that have been recognized and affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada are paramount in our relationship with all other governments - federal, provincial and municipal. Our treaty rights apply to all our people across our traditional territories. This includes all the Mi'kmaq in Newfoundland. Our treaties and the Supreme Court of Canada agreed we have a constitutionally protected right to access the commercial fishery to attain a moderate livelihood so we cannot understand why so many of our people continue to live in poverty both on and off- reserves. For example, a single First Nation person collects a social assistance income of \$74 a week. We feel this is not a way to live and we all must take action to address this situation and allow more of our people to be part of the Canadian dream of prosperity and opportunity.

In 1999, the Supreme Court decision in *Marshall* provided hope to all our people. Access to the commercial fishery through licences, capacity investments and other targeted economic measures allowed many of our people to finally become active participants in the Atlantic economy. The end result is own source revenues for bands and significant job creation which

has benefited most of our communities, but not all, and have provided benefits to all neighboring non-native communities as well.

Relationships have been established across the region and our direct and indirect contribution to the Atlantic economy has been significant. A critical change that occurred is our people and communities now see hope and prosperity in their future. This positive momentum must continue and additional investments are necessary to allow more participation, capacity building and a broader diversification in the fishery sector for our communities.

Federal funding levels and the funding growth of key programs provided and devolved to First Nations must keep pace with costs, services, population growth and critical needs. A ten year cap in funding growth of key federal departments set at 2 to 3 percent must be lifted to ensure First Nations communities are able to provide basic services comparable to other Canadians. Funding growth must be increased to at least 7 – 10% per year over the next 5 years to keep pace with needs in all our communities and for services to be financially sustainable. If not, poverty and despair will continue as well as social discontent which could fuel more radical response and actions. The current First Nation ranking gap of 69<sup>th</sup> versus 8<sup>th</sup> for Canada in the United Nations Human Development index is shameful and will only continue to grow if appropriate action is not taken. First Nations conditions continue to decline while the rest of Canadians prosper.

Our most serious constraints are the funding gaps. There is also a desperate need for more land to accommodate housing and economic development requirements. The current land claims and additions to reserves processes are extremely slow. First Nations lack adequate access to natural resources like the fisheries and forestry. We must strengthen the human capacity in our communities - many of which have very small populations and poor localities.

Our Chiefs vision for the future is to regain the self-reliance we had in the past. We will enhance our capacity to realize our own economic, education and cultural objectives through foundational actions of our own design. We envision having vibrant, prosperous entrepreneurial minded communities. These developments will be balanced to ensure the right social and economic changes. Economic development must be compatible with our people, respectful of our environment and informed by the needs of future generations, ie., sustainable economy development. Our Economic development will be based on regaining access and control of our traditional lands and resources consistent with our Aboriginal and Treaty rights. We expect to be active and respected partners in the formation of public policy and all sectors of the Atlantic economy.

Today modern First Nation communities, like Miawpukek, St. Mary's, Tobique, Lennox Island, Millbrook and Membertou are leading the way toward this new future. Our Chiefs economic strategy details key solutions that include expanded lands / resource base, technology, equity, market expansion for our businesses, improved access to capital, bold entrepreneurships, more jobs, well educated and skilled workforce, health, stability and nation rebuilding.

Our Chiefs are very supportive of open transparent and inclusive governance of our people. Our focus on rebuilding our economy is critical if change is to occur in the next 5 years and tangible results are to be seen in each and every community. Accountability and improvements to the way we govern are paramount to maintain our personal level of accountability of our Chiefs and Councils have to all our citizens. Our Chiefs see clear results as a must and high standards of accountability as a cornerstone of our future.

The Health Status of our people is another critical issue and is steadily eroding based on service and policy changes in the First Nation and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada.

Refinements of policy, new criteria and standards of eligibility have contributed to increasing numbers of early deaths in our communities. Health problems like hypertension, diabetes, cancers, addictions and mental health illnesses have become a death sentence for many of our people. Reductions in transportation services to medical appointments, reductions in eligible prescription drugs and a lack of available mental health services have had drastic negative results. Both Canadian and International health research studies have shown poverty and poverty conditions correlate to poor health status. We need jobs, opportunities, education and an economy to help improve our overall health status.

Recent Atlantic regional longitudinal health survey data suggests the following:

1. Adults with Diabetes ----- 19.7%
2. Adults that Smoke ----- 64.5%
3. Youth Smoking starts at --- Age 13
4. Youth Depressed in the past- two weeks  
Male ----22.1 % / Female -----35 %
5. Youth use of mood Altering Substances ----60%

**Measures Proposals:**

1. Targeted investments to increase First Nations Access and capacity in the fisheries sector to build on past success is documented in our APC study on the impact of the *Marshall* decision in our region. We suggest that at least \$40 million dollars per year over 5 years should be invested by DFO to continue this effort and success.
2. Targeted First Nation investments should be made in Atlantic First Nation communities in the amount of \$10- 15 million dollars a year to support our economic development

strategy. This includes direct investments, First Nations capacity building, and additions to reserves.

3. Expansion of the Human Resource Skills Development funding for the Aboriginal Strategic Employment Partnerships program and bringing measures to accelerate Atlantic First Nations participation in the critical shortage sectors of the Atlantic economy. These measures would include at least \$20 million dollars of additional funds per year for training capacity efforts in Atlantic Canada.
4. Funding growth for key federal departments like Department Indian and Northern Affairs, Health Canada and Human Resource Skill Development and other federal departments part of the Aboriginal Horizontal Framework should grow at a rate to ensure program sustainability at the First Nations level and is tied to quality basic services and that all services must be comparable to what is provided to all Canadians.