LANGUAGE AND CULTURE SECTOR

What has the Language and Culture Sector worked on over the last quarter?

Over the last quarter, the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) Languages and Culture Sector has been working towards the full implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act*. The Co-Development Table, which assisted in the creation of the *Indigenous languages Act,* has now evolved into the Joint Implementation Steering Committee (JISC), and is comprised of representatives from the Assembly of First Nations, Canadian Heritage (DCH), the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and the Métis National Council (MNC). The JISC is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the *Act,* including the implementation of the development of an Indigenous Languages Funding Model (ILFM), to establish measures for adequate, sustainable and long-term funding related to the Act, and the appointment of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages and up to three Directors, to the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous languages (OCIL). Within JISC, two working groups were created to help advance work. The Indigenous Languages Communication Working Group is mandated to develop joint communications that reflect the direction provided through JISC. The Joint Symposium Working Group is working towards a national symposium on Indigenous languages.

The *Indigenous languages Act* mandates the government of Canada to facilitate meaningful opportunities for Indigenous governments, and other Indigenous governing bodies and organizations, to collaborate in policy development related to the implementation of the *Act*. The current consultations present an opportunity for First Nations to collaborate on the design and development of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, and the Indigenous Languages Funding Model (ILFM). The overall objective of these consultations is to engage meaningfully with Indigenous governments, governing bodies and organizations on matters that may affect the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act*; this is to ensure that a comprehensive cross–section of perspectives of Indigenous Peoples are reflected in government decision-making in respect of the *Act*. Using a distinctions-based approach, AFN is providing advice to DCH in conducting meaningful consultations. Due to the developments of COVID-19, the consultations will be conducted virtually, once Indigenous organizations, governments, and governing bodies are ready to do so in the coming months.

The purpose of these consultations, is to better understand how the flow of funding can be improved to better reflect the needs of First Nations and First Nations language organizations, and to work towards the appointment of a Commissioner of Indigenous languages as soon as possible, preferably by October 1, 2020.

Due to the advocacy of National Chief Perry Bellegarde and the AFN's Executive Committee, the federal government's Budget 2019 committed $333.7 million over five years, and $115.7 million each year after that, to support the reclamation, preservation, and revitalization of Indigenous languages and to implement the *Act*. However, the Languages and Culture Sector has advocated for greater funding to

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support all Indigenous languages projects lead by First Nations language champions, and actually achieve the stated goal of sustainable and long-term funding. In terms of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, the appointment will be based on a recommendation by the Minister to the Governor in Council (GIC). The Languages and Culture Sector is advocating for meaningful engagement regarding naming a Commissioner.

The Languages and Culture Sector has resumed planning the National Symposium on Indigenous Languages. The AFN will be working with the MNC, the ITK, and the DCH on this event, through the Symposium Working Group. The Symposium is tentatively scheduled to take place in the fall of 2020 and may proceed through a series of virtual events rather than in-person, depending on public health guidelines at that time. This Symposium will be a forum for Indigenous language champions, experts, Indigenous leadership, representatives from the federal, provincial and territorial governments, academics, and international guests to gather, learn and share best practices and experiences on the Indigenous Languages Funding Model, the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, the upcoming United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages and best practices in language preservation, reclamation, revitalization, and normalization. The main purpose is to identify principles and recommendations for the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act.*

What is your Sector planning for the future?

The Languages and Culture Sector's main concern is that this year, the demand for language revitalization funding is expected to be nearly three times higher than the amount of funding available for First Nations. It is advocating for funding to meet funding needs as identified by First Nations, and for Indigenous language experts and language champions to lead the process ant the consultations required, so that all discussions are meaningful and purposeful to the objectives First Nations and the *Act*.

The AFN's Languages and Culture Sector supports the full implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act* which should include adequate, sustainable, and long-term funding for the preservation, maintenance, reclamation, normalization and protection of Indigenous languages. The Languages and Culture Sector is developing a National Strategy for language revitalization as well as supporting the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The appointment of the Commissioner at OCIL is a short-term priority for October 1, 2020. Longer-term, the JISC is working towards supporting the establishment of the OCIL and supporting the development of an Indigenous Languages Funding Framework that meets the needs of First Nations.

Upcoming Events

- **Fall 2020** - Department of Canadian Heritage consultations – Location TBD
- **Tentative - fall 2020** - National Symposium on Indigenous languages – Location TBD

The AFN is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada.
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