



## What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Economic Development Sector advocates that policy respects and mobilizes the self-determination of First Nations, the rights of First Nations and both the traditional and market economies of First Nations. The Sector has been focused on ensuring First Nations are able to access economic supports related to coronavirus response. As we move forward, the AFN is also advocating to ensure that First Nations are in a position to drive the economic recovery to ensure a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all Canadians.

The Economic Development Sector currently advocates on agriculture, trade, natural resources and connectivity as part of a broader economic approach to advance the economic interests of First Nations.

The AFN's work on First Nations agriculture is aligned with Resolution 47/2016, *First Nations Economic Opportunities Through a First Nations Agriculture Strategy*, which recognizes the need for increased First Nations participation and opportunities within the agriculture and agri-foods sector. The AFN has developed a positive working level relationship with Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada (AAFC). This has resulted in securing capacity to begin working towards a First Nations agriculture strategy.

Activity on trade has been in support of several Chiefs-in-Assembly resolutions, with the most recent being Resolution 37/2019, *Continued Advocacy on Canada's International Trade Agreements to achieve Economic Reconciliation*. Work has been focused on respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, advocating for a Trade and Indigenous Peoples chapter in trade agreements, and for trade programs and processes to include First Nations.

The AFN continues to advocate for inclusivity of opportunity and respect for the rights of First Nations to their natural resources between First Nations governments and Canada. This includes working across several natural resources issues, ranging from the 2 Billion Trees initiative to clean energy development, to advocate that government policies and programs are sufficiently flexible to ensure accessibility by First Nations and to respond to the expressed needs of First Nations from these initiatives.

The Chiefs-in-Assembly have acknowledged the importance of First Nations economic participation in procurement through resolutions, including Resolution 38/2019, *Increasing First Nations Procurement Opportunities and Benefits*. Targeted Indigenous procurement under the federal Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business represents less than 1% of all federal

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procurement. Improved access to procurement represents a significant economic opportunity for First Nations businesses.

On connectivity, the AFN continues to advocate that First Nations reserves meet the minimum standard of 50/10mbps for speed and data. Advocacy is focused on ensuring federal programs and policies such as the Universal Broadband Fund and the “High-Speed Access for All: Canada’s Connectivity Strategy” are implemented to close the digital divide between First Nations and the rest of Canada.

### **How has the AFN’s recent advocacy affected this area?**

To date, the Economic Development Sector has focused on agriculture-specific research that will contribute to the development of the First Nations Agriculture Strategy. In 2019/2020, the AFN completed an agriculture gap analysis which provided baseline information in the development of a framework for a First Nations Agriculture Strategy. In 2020/2021, the Sector completed a draft First Nations Agriculture and Agri-Foods Framework and a draft report which works to set out foundations upon which a First Nations Agricultural Strategy can be developed based on inherent and Treaty rights as well as international law.

The AFN and Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) have outlined a draft workplan to guide NRCan engagement with the AFN and to guide its leadership and technical processes. The AFN has advocated with NRCan to ensure that initiatives stemming from Budget 2020 investments allow full and meaningful engagement that will result in planning, decision-making and implementation processes that reflect First Nations priorities as set out in AFN resolutions.

NRCan’s programs are being developed pursuant to Canada’s strengthened climate plan, *A Healthy Environment, and a Healthy Economy*. The plan recognizes the unique realities, needs, and priorities of First Nations, respect self-determination, advance early and meaningful engagement, advance co-development, and collaboration. The plan claims to achieve these objectives by ensuring the full and effective participation of First Nations in policy and program governance.

In the area of Trade, the AFN continues to advocate that Canada must prioritize provisions and exceptions to protect First Nations’ rights consistent with the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), in their other trade negotiations such as in the Pacific Alliance, and in their new model for investment agreements. The AFN has advocated that new international trade agreements should be implemented in a manner that enhances opportunities for First Nations’

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trade and investment. The AFN continues to work with the Indigenous Working Group led by Global Affairs Canada to advocate for inclusivity in discussion on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The AFN continues to advocate for increased First Nations procurement opportunities, benefits, and to monitor the implementation of changes to policies. The Government of Canada has committed to increasing the Indigenous procurement target to 5% of all federal procurement and is considering changes to Indigenous procurement process and policies.

Budget 2021 has added an additional \$1B toward the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's (ISED) Universal Broadband Fund (UBF), increasing the fund to \$2.7 billion for broadband initiatives. The AFN has advocated that First Nations specific funding is needed, as well as discussing the need for flexibility in funding requirements that will allow for more First Nations to be eligible for the funding. The goal of these initiatives is to reflect Indigenous considerations, priorities and interests in their program development and design. These efforts are currently at different stages of development and dialogue will need to be ongoing.

### **Where do we hope to go in the future?**

Throughout 2021/22, the AFN will continue to work with the Chiefs Committee on Economic Development (CCED) and First Nations leadership on options to improve First Nations economic involvement in agriculture, trade, forestry, 2 billion trees initiative and natural resources. This will include completing a policy paper on *Planning for New Investments and Approaches to support First Nations in the Economy* and continuing the dialogue with Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Global Affairs Canada to ensure an integrated and transformative approach to economic development policy and programming.

The AFN will provide technical support to draft a First Nations agriculture strategy based on First Nations perspectives, priorities and agriculture trends. The drafting of a First Nations Agriculture Strategy from a First Nations lens will ensure it reflects past experiences, First Nations, businesses, industry, and governments in the agriculture and agri-foods sector.

Further, the AFN will continue to advocate for First Nations trade opportunities, trade supports and access to international markets through the inclusion of Indigenous chapters in future trade agreements, and the development of additional programming and policies to enhance market access for First Nations enterprises.

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Regarding procurement activity, the AFN will work with the CCED on a First Nations-led procurement action plan, monitor policy changes, and continue to advocate for First Nations access to opportunities in federal, provincial/territorial and private sector procurement.

The AFN will continue to advocate for the full and effective participation of First Nations in the implementation of *A Healthy Environment, and A Healthy Economy*. While some progress is being made, there is more work to do related to policies, programs and elements of the strategy.

On connectivity, the AFN will follow up on Budget 2021 commitments and work to ensure that First Nations are able to participate in all aspects of the digital economy. This will include continuing work with ISED and other federal departments and agencies to ensure the federal government continues its work to close the digital divide between First Nations and the rest of Canada.

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