

## **NUNATUKAVUT COMMUNITY COUNCIL PRESENTS TO THE PUBLIC INQUIRY RESPECTING GROUND SEARCH AND RESCUE FOR LOST AND MISSING PERSONS'**

**MARY'S HARBOUR, LABRADOR, November 9, 2021** – NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) President Todd Russell formally presented to the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons' (the "Inquiry") on November 8, 2021.

This Inquiry was spurred by the tragic loss of Burton Winters, a young teenager from Makkovik who froze to death on sea ice, and whose family experienced unacceptable delays in search and rescue efforts. The Inquiry was tasked with reviewing the organization and operation of ground search and rescue in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and making recommendations that the Commissioner considers necessary and advisable related to ground search and rescue in the Province.

The Inquiry's focus is of utmost importance to NunatuKavut communities. Shortly after being announced, NCC approached the Inquiry to have standing and to appear. That request was granted. Since that time, matters of life and death and search and rescue became a tragic reality for many families in NunatuKavut, including President Russell's own family. On September 17, his nephew Marc Russell and Marc's crewmate Joey Jenkins were lost at sea. On that day, they failed to return to port after an inshore fishing trip and neither the boat or men have been recovered. The loss of these young men has again raised questions and concerns around a deeply flawed search and rescue system. Jeanette and Dwight Russell, parents of Marc, made a powerful and strong presentation at the Inquiry in the telling of their family's story of tragedy. They advocated for a greatly needed and improved search and rescue system in Labrador.

The sharing of Jeanette and Dwight's experiences was part of an extensive presentation that NCC made to the Inquiry. President Russell talked about the emotional toll that these kind of experiences and tragedies have on our people and communities. He provided an overview of the testimonials from members in communities throughout NunatuKavut that were compiled to better understand the concerns and expectations of our members relating to search and rescue in times of emergencies. President Russell cited the wide range of concerns identified by NCC members in these testimonials, as well as the potential opportunities that exist if the right resources are appropriately utilized.

NCC also engaged the services of Merv Wiseman, a search and rescue expert, to assist with the more technical aspects of NCC's presentation to the Inquiry. Mr. Wiseman helped frame the current search and rescue situation in NunatuKavut and identify the serious SAR resource gaps, particularly the tremendous void that exists in many NunatuKavut communities. Mr. Wiseman spoke about the many moving parts within the scope of the entire search and rescue system and about how, in order for it to work, there must be a high level of interoperability among agencies and individuals. NCC provided 10 summary recommendations to assist the Inquiry in its deliberations towards a final report. They can be found in APPENDIX A.

NCC looks forward to the final report from this important Inquiry, and fully expects it will play a key role in helping secure a modern, world-class search and rescue system for NunatuKavut, and all of Labrador.

## Quotes

“The deep sense of pain and loss expressed by the Winters’ family is tragically part of the story of many families in the coastal communities of NunatuKavut. I know too well the deep impacts that a tragedy like the one experienced by my own family and others can have on our people and communities. Families should not have to be dealing with jurisdictional issues nor should they have to fight for the basic search and rescue resources and attention that is desperately needed during an emergency situation. The search and rescue system can and must be improved. Our presentation was focussed on making the search and rescue system, whether on land or at sea, a world class system that our people deserve. One that all Labradorians deserve. I want to thank the Inquiry, especially Judge Igloliorte, for taking on what can be life-saving work. Nakummek.”

*-- Todd Russell, President of NCC*

## Quick Facts

- NCC is the representative governing body for approximately 6,000 Inuit who reside primarily in south and central Labrador.
- NunatuKavut means “Our Ancient Land” in Inuttitut and is the traditional territory of the Inuit who belong to this territory.
- In July 2018, NCC entered into talks with the Government of Canada on the Recognition of its Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination (RIRSD). In September 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed.

## Associated Links

- Further information on NCC can be found at [www.nunatukavut.ca](http://www.nunatukavut.ca). Please also join in the conversation at [Facebook.com/nunatukavut](https://www.facebook.com/nunatukavut), Twitter [@nunatukavut](https://twitter.com/nunatukavut) and YouTube by searching NunatuKavut.

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## **APPENDIX A: SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NCC ON SEARCH AND RESCUE**

NCC offered the following summary recommendations to the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons,' requesting that:

1. The Inquiry acknowledge the unique characteristics of NunatuKavut within the scope of the provincial mandate on GSAR and recommend that the provincial government undertake a full needs analysis within six months, in conjunction with the NCC, designed to formally identify the existing gaps in SAR infrastructure.
2. Based on the formal "needs analysis," Emergency Services of the provincial government, collaborate with the NCC in creating a long-term NunatuKavut strategic plan for GSAR with special emphasis directed towards shortcomings in current SAR infrastructure.
3. Appropriate police forces and the NLSARA collaborate with NCC in creating additional GSAR volunteer teams in areas of NunatuKavut that are currently without this important organization.
4. Immediate measures be taken to address the serious deficiencies in dedicated surface and air resources for NunatuKavut.
5. Special emphasis be placed on the Goose Bay airport and the DND 444 Air Force Base in facilitating dedicated rotary and fixed-wing air resources in support of SAR for NunatuKavut.
6. In conjunction with existing aviation companies and outfitters, outreach to the Canadian Air SAR Association (CASARA) be initiated to form a zonal team at the Goose Bay CAF Air Base.
7. Reliable communications networks, such as mobile and overall cellular towers and repeaters, be established in NunatuKavut inland and coastal areas.
8. In order to address existing gaps in Ground SAR Teams in NunatuKavut and, where trained and competent Canadian Rangers are present in communities along the southern Labrador coast, special measures be implemented to detail and ensure their full utilization during SAR emergencies. Moreover, and where maritime resources are required on a humanitarian basis, a similar arrangement be made to ensure effective and efficient utilization of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CGA).
9. In the interest of interoperability among SAR stakeholders, proactive measures be undertaken by the multi-jurisdictional Command-and-Control leads to formalize a smooth and informed decision-making matrix regarding available resources to be utilized during SAR emergencies. Furthermore, a formal inventory of available resources such as Department of Fisheries (DFO) Conservation and Protection watercraft vehicles and NCC Guardian watercrafts, as well as others of opportunity, should be journalized for utilization in SAR emergencies.
10. Due to the transient nature of police personnel in NunatuKavut, clarity and communications be required around the role and responsibilities of the RCMP in relation to SAR and that, at all times, RCMP officers be well-trained and have the capacity to lead SAR missions. Furthermore, the RCMP have a clear understanding of the resources that are available to them and that this information is clearly communicated to NCC and NunatuKavut communities.