

NUNATUKAVUT COMMUNITY COUNCIL SAYS FINAL REPORT FROM THE PUBLIC INQUIRY RESPECTING GROUND SEARCH AND RESCUE FOR LOST AND MISSING PERSONS A GOOD START BUT MUCH MORE WORK TO BE DONE

HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, LABRADOR, December 2, 2021 – The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) today issued the following statement in response to yesterday’s release of the final report from the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons’ (the “Inquiry”):

“We thank the Commissioner, Judge James J. Igloliorte, and his team for the extensive work and outreach that was undertaken to prepare the final report. NCC was invited to appear before the Inquiry and we were honoured to make a formal presentation on November 8. At that time, we presented NCC’s 10 summary recommendations, many of which do align with the recommendations laid out in the final report.

While we are pleased to see that the serious concerns we raised were heard by the Inquiry, we are indeed disappointed that the report does not directly address the gap in federal assets, particularly around marine and the use of Canadian Air Force assets in 5 Wing Goose Bay. It is unfortunate that the limitations in scope hindered the Inquiry from getting into the very real jurisdictional issues that exists. NCC strongly advocates for the availability of adequate air and marine resources and that clarity and communications be required around the roles and responsibilities of the various components related to search and rescue.

We are hopeful as the report does talk about interoperability. The report states that there is “a wish to see the Province continue its efforts to seek high level cooperation with their federal counterparts so that people do not feel interjurisdictional misunderstanding or excessive protocols hamper searches.” The report also recognizes that delays do occur where the Province has to rely on federal government assets that are not primarily dedicated to ground search and rescue. A number of recommendations encourage formal relationships between the provincial and federal governments around search and rescue. We are pleased that the Commissioner recommends the Province seek a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Canada so that search and rescue operations in coastal regions are organized in an integrated and transparent manner.

NCC is especially encouraged by the section of the report titled “Ground Search and Rescue for Indigenous Communities.” This section outlined the lack of local Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association (NLSARA) teams in some Indigenous communities, including all NunatuKavut communities in southern Labrador. It also describes the close relationship between ground search and rescue and marine search and rescue. The report notes “The legally important operational distinction between ground search and rescue and marine search and rescue, not obviously logical, becomes absurd when one considers ‘traditional activities engaged by Indigenous people on the land’ and further reflects on how ‘on the land’, ‘on the water’ and ‘on the ice’ are so often interconnected, perhaps on the same journey.” The report goes on to recommend focussed engagement with Indigenous groups so that “a culturally sensitive ground search and rescue resource, within or outside of NLSARA (but if outside then with at least equivalent training, equipment and funding), may be established in such communities.”

NCC is optimistic that the important recommendations set out in the report will be heard and we call on the provincial government to implement these recommendations without delay. While the final report does not focus on federal jurisdiction around search and rescue, it is clear that the federal components of search and rescue are essential to successful missions. To this end, NCC fully expects to be engaged in the building of a modern, world-class search and rescue system for NunatuKavut. We want to work with willing partners to ensure that NunatuKavut and all of Labrador have the necessary assets to make this happen.”

Media Contact

Kelly Broomfield

Director of Communications

T. 709-280-5965

E. communications@nunatukavut.ca