NunatuKavut
our ancient land

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INUIT GROUP CONTINUES TO HIGHLIGHT SEVERE DEFICIENCIES IN SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN LABRADOR: CALLS FOR GREATER INVESTMENT IN SAR

Leader Attends Conference which falls on the Anniversary of the Loss of Fishermen Marc Russell and Joey Jenkins off Labrador

ST. JOHNS, NL, September 14, 2023 – NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) President Todd Russell along with other representatives of the NCC are attending Canada's largest national search and rescue conference and expo to call for action on the pressing necessity for improved Search and Rescue (SAR) infrastructure in Labrador.

Themed "Learning from the Past, Evolving for the Future," the conference intends to review past events and losses at sea or on land, and to explore innovations, technological advancements, environmental and vulnerability factors that have cost numerous lives in Newfoundland and Labrador. The conference comes on the eve of the two-year anniversary of the loss of fishermen Marc Russell (President Russell's nephew) and Joey Jenkins.

Mounting concern has been raised by NCC, given the substantial role that the commercial fishery plays in the economy in NunatuKavut and the lives of those who spend so much time on the water. There has been a serious lack of SAR infrastructure and availability of essential air resources, as well as a complete void in Canadian Coast Guard lifeboat stations. Many of these concerns previously culminated in the Inquiry into Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons in Newfoundland and Labrador, where the collaboration between provincial and federal bodies and the readiness of SAR provisions have been called into question.

"Our very existence depends on this," stated NCC President Todd Russell. "Inadequate and delayed SAR resources are totally unacceptable for our communities. The SAR facilities in NunatuKavut and throughout Labrador significantly lag behind the standards seen in other regions of the province and across Canada. Every resident deserves the basic right to life protection, no matter where they reside. Anything else borders on discrimination."

NCC has strongly advocated for establishing 5-Wing Goose Bay as a primary SAR base with dedicated air recourses and trained crews, emphasizing the critical importance of ensuring the safety of Indigenous communities and many northerners as a significant step toward reconciliation by the federal government. Likewise in the marine environment, lifeboat stations or similar infrastructure or capacity must be put in place.

"In life and death situations, every minute counts. Any moment of delay leaves us very vulnerable," stated President Russell. "We are experiencing the very real impacts of climate change on our lands, ice and waters. It is and will change the way we live, hunt, harvest and how we eat. We must continue to lead decision-making for the safety and protection of our people and communities. Continued inaction could result in further serious and devastating consequences."

The NCC acknowledges that this is a particularly difficult and tragic time for the community of Fleur de Lys and surrounding areas with the tragic loss of two fishermen, and one still missing. NunatuKavut Inuit and many of our communities share their pain and loss. We extend our condolences to all of the loved ones and families who have been impacted.

NEWS RELEASE

-30-

About: The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) is a governing organization that represents the rights and interests of Inuit who come from southeast, south, and central Labrador. NCC is committed to advocating for section 35 rights, interests, and priorities of NunatuKavut Inuit. Rooted in the rich traditions and culture of NunatuKavut Inuit, NCC works diligently towards self-government and self-determination, while fostering community growth and sustainability. To learn more, visit: https://nunatukavut.ca/

Media Contact:
Kelly Broomfield, Chief of Communications, T. 709-280-5965; E. communications@nunatukavut.ca