

# Harmonization of laws in the K'áhshq District

## *Summary Report: Joint Community Workshop*

Fort Good Hope, NWT – November 27-28, 2018

### BACKGROUND

Colville Lake and Fort Good Hope are negotiating self-government agreements that will establish two governments which will have law-making power in the same district. The two communities met to have a joint workshop to update each other on their negotiations and to start talking about how they will harmonize their laws to make sure they don't cause confusion for members or conflict between the two Indigenous governments. The goal was to share information and get input from community members so the negotiation teams can conclude agreements that respect the history, culture, values and practices of the two communities.



### WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

- The leadership of both communities expressed their support for harmonization and for working together based on their shared culture and tradition.
- Many participants said they appreciated the workshop and that it was a good thing that the two communities had come together to discuss self-government and other issues. They said many times that it is important for Colville Lake and Fort Good Hope to work together and that more workshops and conferences are needed.
- Negotiators from the two communities (Jennifer Duncan for Colville Lake and Daniel T'seleie for Fort Good Hope) gave an update on their negotiations. They also explained what it means to harmonize laws and why it will be necessary.
- Most of the workshop time was dedicated to comments and questions from the participants. There were also some small group discussions about specific questions on harmonization.
- Participants welcomed the chance to share their knowledge of how the K'áhshq and Delhà people governed themselves in the past and how that can be applied to the issues the communities are facing today.

## KEY POINTS

This is a short summary of some of the main points made by participants during the workshop.

- **People support the harmonization approach.** They do not want a line between the communities. This is also the direction given by the Elders.
- **It is important for the two communities to speak in a more unified way.** It is okay to disagree, as long as we are all working together.
- **It is important to honour this history and to continue to listen to the Elders.** The stories and the words of Elders provide the wisdom that is needed to govern ourselves.
- **People see self-government as a chance to revitalize culturally-based ways of governing that were damaged by the colonizers.** The K'áhshq and Delhà people already know how to govern themselves. Self-government is a chance to do things our own way again.
- **A lot of the important information is oral, including information about land use and Dene laws and teachings.** This needs to be documented for self-government, but people also want to be able to continue to use oral ways of governing in their own language.
- **Many people talked about their concerns for the young people today,** including alcohol, drugs, pregnancy, violence, the negative influence of the media, as well as the loss of language and culture. They want to teach young people to be respectful, resourceful and independent so they can make a good life and be happy.
- **People are very frustrated and mistrustful of government, especially the GNWT.** They want to reduce the GNWT's influence and control through self-government.
- People are facing many problems today, such as addiction, unemployment and violence. The land claims did not really help. **Life is still hard and stressful. People need jobs and an income.** There is hope that self-government will allow the K'áhshq and Delhà governments to deal with these problems in their own way, using their own culture and wisdom.
- **The land is fundamentally important to governance.** The K'áhshq and Delhà people are so connected to the land. Many of the stories shared were about the land and the lessons that were learned while out on the land.
- In sharing their stories about the past, people shared some of the **key principles and values of the Dene way of life.** These give guidance for the future as well.
  - Everyone contributed and played their role.
  - People were good to each other and took care of each other.
  - There was no fighting or hurting each other. We knew how to disagree respectfully.
  - There was discipline and strong values. We taught children how to lead a good life.
  - Youth were respectful and listened to Elders.
  - Mothers and grandmothers played a key role in keeping the family healthy and strong. We respect women and treated them well.
  - People didn't get involved in each other's business.
  - We respected ourselves, we respected each other and we respected our surroundings.

## FEEDBACK ON HARMONIZATION OF LAWS

Participants were asked how the K'áhshq people worked together *in the past* to avoid confusion or conflict about the rules and protocols in their shared area. They made these key points:

- **Elders played a critical role. When they spoke, everyone listened.** Elders were more like leaders – they sat together and talked. This is how families were represented.
- **Youth would be included.** They would sit and listen, watch and learn.
- **People listened to each other.**
- **There were gatherings.** We all were from different places, all over the land, we would all gather together. We were one people and we worked together.
- We had **strong values**:
  - Help one another
  - Respect one another
  - Be honest with each other (nothing was hidden).
- **If there was a stranger on your land, you would be good to them.** That way in the future, you knew they would be good to you in return.
- **We could agree to disagree and then come up with a solution.** We lived in harmony. We didn't get mad or argue about who is right. We could find "peaceful resolution".
- We could correct one another in a good way (no put downs).
- We had **strong communication and sharing of information.**
- **Family groups** were important and part of the governance structure.
- **All individuals had a role to play** – elders, middle age, mothers, youth, etc. Every person was independent, but contributed to the group.
- **Relationships were strong and positive.** We visited and enjoyed each others company. It was not always serious, like it is today.
- **Story telling was important.** Children started learning from stories at an early age.
- **The Chief had a very important role** and was a very respected person.

They also talked about how their governments should work together *in the future*.

- The Dene way is **consensus decision-making.**
- **We need to continue learning from the stories of our Elders,** it can take years.
- We want to **avoid any conflict** in the future between the two governments.
- **Find good ways to disagree and discuss things,** be kind and respectful, ask others "what do you think?"
- We need to **stick together** and figure out how we want to move forward together.
- **We already know how to harmonize laws.** We were one people and we worked well together. We need to understand, document and use these principles.
- The **story of Ayoni Keh** provides guidance. It happened for a reason. We need to document those lessons.
- **We should take all our Dene laws and document them so we can use them.** A joint workshop of the two communities on Dene laws was suggested.
- **Language is an important part of governance.** We need people who understand both our language and English well. These people will play an important role in the future.

- **What about harmonization in cases of development?** Both communities will want to benefit. How can we apply our Dene laws in those cases?
- **Need our own people educated and working for us.**
- **Want to have youth involved in the process.** Teach our youth about our history as part of our self-government.
- **We always need to try to put our identity in how we do things as governments.**

## WORKSHOP OUTCOME

At the end of the workshop, the facilitator confirmed that the next step is to have the two negotiation teams work together on how they will include harmonization of laws in their agreements and come back to the community members with a proposed approach.

## ADDITIONAL RECORDS OF THE WORKSHOP

Detailed notes were taken by both negotiation teams and the workshops was recorded for future use. Detailed notes were taken by both negotiation teams and the workshops was recorded for their future use. Community members interested in obtaining more detailed notes and recordings should contact their negotiation team.