

Ontario chiefs want a say over fishing, hunting rules

By Vicki White, Expositor Staff

June 6/91

OHSWEKEN — Native leaders say aboriginal hunting and fishing rights may be the first big test of the provincial government's willingness to recognize their right to self-government.

They say the Ministry of Natural Resources is encroaching on their right to hunt and fish, and they want the province to back off.

One of the tools in their fight may be a political statement drawn up by the province and the Chiefs of Ontario, the provincial arm of the Assembly of First Nations.

The statement, which recognizes native people's inherent right to self-government, was ratified Wednesday by about 100 chiefs at the lobby group's annual meeting on the Six Nations reserve.

The Ministry of Natural Resources recently released guidelines for recognizing aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, while ensuring those rights are exercised in a safe and responsible manner.

"That goes against the statement made by Bob Rae that they're recognizing our right to self-government," said Six Nations Chief Coun. William Montour.

He said native people should be making their own decisions on such issues.

"I see this statement of political relationship as a tool to make them accountable."

Roger Jones, an elder and former chief of the Shawanaga First Nation north of Parry Sound, said native people have always been able to conserve and protect the wildlife while practicing their traditional lifestyle.

It is non-native people who need regulating, he said. "Fishing to them is for sport. Hunting is for trophies."

Mr. Jones said the best way to protect wildlife

would be for the province to stop bringing tourists for hunting and fishing holidays.

He said the policy was developed in response to pressure by organizations such as the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, a lobby group which has expressed concerns about special rules for native hunters and anglers.

Fred Plain, an Ojibwa elder from Sarnia, said native governments must ward off the province by developing their own laws and policies.

"If we are talking about governments, then we are talking about the ability to formulate laws.

"You cannot respond realistically to the federal government or to the province unless you have policies to back up what you're talking about."

The ministry guidelines, released at the end of May, are described as an "interim policy" to be used until they are replaced by negotiated agreements with aboriginal people.