

Casting for justice: fish, land and self-government

by Mike Milne

The concrete dock disappears into the rocky shoreline as we motor east along Colpoys Bay in the early morning sun. The 14-foot open steel boat cuts through the calm water, limestone bluffs tower from the forest behind us and two large wooded islands rise out of Georgian Bay to the south. I'm huddled in the bow while Ken Johnston and his five-year-old son Jeremiah sit quietly in the middle seat. Paul Jones, gripping the handle of an aging out-board motor, prays silently and drops tobacco over the waters.

We're heading out to check his nets, set the day before in 70 to 100 feet of water. Made of nylon fishing line, the nets are about three feet deep, with weights along the bottom and floats on the top, allowing the netting to float upright on the lake bottom.

Jones has invited me to see how the fishing is done at Cape Croker, near Warton, Ont. The Chippewas of Nawash (members of the Ojibway

tribe) have been charged with over-fishing, are defending their right to fish commercially, and also face a provincial ban on fish sales.

Many of the fishermen have been forced onto welfare, but more than immediate financial survival is at stake. The Chippewas of Nawash and Chippewas of Saugeen, a "sister" band with a reserve near Southampton, Ont. (who together make up the Saugeen Ojibway Nations Territories), are fighting to secure commercial fishing quotas that make sense, but also the right to control fishing in the area.

The Saugeen Ojibway want their right to self-government, in the area of fishing at least, recognized, and support has come from the United Church's national human rights officer, from Hamilton Conference, from Bruce Presbytery (there are United Churches in both the Saugeen and Nawash communities) and from area United Church ministers and lay people. The fight over fishing also brings Saugeen Ojibway land claims — now under negotiation — into sharper focus.

Both ironworkers by trade, Jones

