

# Resource revenues could lift some First Nations out of poverty, report urges

TORONTO—Aboriginal people need to share fully in resource revenues in order to use those developments to lift their communities out of poverty, says a new report submitted to the federal government and the Assembly of First Nations.

The Working Group on Natural Resource Development was established after a meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and former AFN national chief Shawn Atleo in 2013 and charged with charting a course that would allow greater First Nations' benefit from resource development.

The report released in Toronto on Tuesday echoed the demands for resource revenue sharing that have been issued by new AFN national chief Perry Bellegarde. Some provincial leaders, including Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, reject that approach.

The working group made it clear that First Nations are not opposed to all resource development on their traditional territories. On the contrary, it said those projects can be important contributors to the long-term prosperity of their communities — but only if aboriginal com-

munities are treated as full partners, and not merely an interest group to be consulted after project planning is well underway.

"Resource development is already the largest private employer of aboriginal people in Canada," the report said. "We need to prepare now to ensure that all of the opportunities and benefits of natural resource development will be fully shared by First Nations and all Canadians."

It described the progress on resource revenue sharing as an "urgent and pressing issue," that will help overcome aboriginal opposition to resource projects that are often tied up in the courts.

The co-chairs were Cameron Alexis, the AFN's regional chief in Alberta and a former RCMP officer, and Douglas Turnbull, a Toronto-based former deputy chair of TD Securities Inc.

"The basic message is that we need to be involved at the front end [of project planning], and not the 11th hour," Chief Alexis said. "You have to have a complete paradigm shift in how we do business in this country."

The report said many First Nations communities are simply not prepared for the

development that may be coming their way. The report recycles Natural Resources Canada's estimate that Canada could see \$675-billion in resource projects in the next decade — though that estimate was made a few years ago, prior to the collapse in commodity prices.

It said aboriginal communities need to improve the governance of their band-owned corporations, which currently provide contracting work for many resources companies, and to increase their financial literacy, their access to capital and to technical and advisory services required to assess proposed resource developments.

But while the group insists many people in aboriginal communities welcome development, they warn that industry and government must build trust that future projects will be completed with as little impact on the environment as possible.

"Communities have experienced the downside of natural resource development with polluted waters and air, devastated hunting and fishing pursuits and negative health effects," the report

said. "This has left a lasting negative impression and has resulted in a lack of confidence in existing regulatory processes and safeguards." Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Perry Bellegarde, who is in Geneva, Switzerland, participating in the 28TH session of the United Nations Human Rights Council said "This is an issue that is critical to First Nations and all Canadians and any movement forward must respect and recognize First Nations rights and title. First Nations need to be involved in resource development during all phases.

We bring the added element of ensuring the protection of lands and waters. Sustainable economic development is what we want. I encourage First Nations to review the report and consider next steps consistent with our right to self-determination. I look forward to continuing the conversation and dialogue around the issues raised in this report including the implications for rights and title."

The Working Group was members met on many occasions to discuss their mandate, review recent key studies on First Nations and

resource development, and convened discussion sessions with business and First Nations leaders. Based on this information-gathering phase, they identified four key thematic areas addressed in the report: governance, prosperity, environment, and finance. The report *Advancing Positive, Impactful Change* includes observations and recommendations in all four thematic areas and sets out a series of recommendations for immediate action.

A link to the report is on: <http://www.naturalresourcesdev.com>