



## Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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### **MKO's Response to Manitoba's Speech from the Throne**

***Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB*** – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement in response to the Speech from the Throne, which was shared in Winnipeg this afternoon.

#### **Grand Chief Garrison Settee provides this statement in response to the speech:**

“Today’s Speech from the Throne shares some positive steps. We are pleased that the Government of Manitoba is committed to moving forward with reconciliation. We will look forward to seeing a new monument to Chief Peguis on the grounds of the legislative building to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Selkirk Treaty and the contributions of Saulteaux Chief Peguis and the allied Cree Chiefs who were signatories.

Another positive aspect of the speech is the recognition that forging positive, respectful, and inclusive relationships with Indigenous and Northern communities is fundamental to Manitoba’s economic prosperity. We appreciate the government’s recognition that one aspect of economic progress for First Nations includes the need to expedite Treaty Land Entitlement. Having access to land is a part of Manitoba’s Treaty obligations and enhancing fiscal and economic opportunities for MKO First Nations.

MKO is absolutely a willing partner when it comes to economic development for Northern Manitoba, but it must be done in a way that respects the rights of MKO First Nations. We are concerned the government asserts that they will work to introduce legislation to prevent blockades of transportation routes.

It is absolutely our democratic right to protest. Earlier this year, MKO supported four First Nations that stood their ground and set up blockades in response to operations at the Keeyask construction project in Northern Manitoba. This was done after all attempts at communicating and creating a dialogue with Manitoba Hydro’s CEO failed. The CEO was only willing to come to the table once it became clear that our First Nations would absolutely not back down and would take all steps necessary to protect the health of their citizens. First Nations will continue to do everything in their power to protect their citizens from COVID-19.

Manitoba Hydro is a continuing concern for First Nations. Rates for hydro users living in First Nations increased in September. Today's speech says the government will re-introduce legislation to streamline the 'onerous' process of the Public Utilities Board, enabling it to make decisions sooner and at less cost, benefitting ratepayers. Our question is, which ratepayers is the government concerned about? MKO is rightfully concerned about the ratepayers in Northern and remote communities, many of which cannot afford the current Manitoba Hydro rates. The Public Utilities Board is an entity we rely on to help protect First Nations citizens in Manitoba.

The government has said it will introduce legislative changes to strengthen supports from the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Fund and will seek changes to the Wildlife Act to protect big game species. The province has no right to infringe on our Treaty rights to hunt.

Our right to hunt ties into food security for MKO citizens. The government says it will implement a Food Security Innovation Challenge to launch a 'challenge prize' to accelerate solutions to efficiently increase reliable access to healthy foods in Northern and remote communities. MKO welcomes any moves to address food insecurity but this information is vague. We will seek more information on how the Government of Manitoba seeks to address this issue for Northern Manitoba.

Our biggest disappointment with this Speech from the Throne is the fact that it does not address the insidious issue of racism. At MKO we are all too aware racism continues to be prevalent in many systems, including the health care system and the justice system. Addressing systemic racism continues to be a priority for MKO. We are shocked that today's speech does not acknowledge the existence of racism in Manitoba. Acknowledging this issue is a first necessary step in addressing an issue that can mean the difference between life and death for Indigenous people and people of colour.

Any legislation or policy must use a co-development approach with Northern rights holders having a seat at every negotiating table. MKO will continue to work with the provincial government to ensure that the interests and rights of MKO First Nations are brought to light at the provincial level."

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*Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO) is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 26 First Nation communities in Manitoba's North since 1981. The MKO represents more than 72,000 First Nations people.*