

Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

Winnipeg Sub-Office

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

www.scoinc.mb.ca Facebook: @SCOIncMB



SCO SUPPORTS INTERLAKE FIRST NATIONS IN DISPUTE WITH THE PROVINCE

Time for Pallister to Adhere to Path to Reconciliation Act

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) stands with the Interlake Reserves Tribal Council (IRTC) as it continues to defend First Nations' land and Treaty rights and confronts the province's proposed construction of the Lake Manitoba Outlets Channel.

"Yesterday, the premier continued to cement his legacy of deceit and division when it comes to the First Nations of this province," stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "To say that he is adequately consulting and engaging with First Nations is unequivocally false. Manitobans need to know the truth and not be misled by a deceptive leader."

SCO is joining its Interlake relatives in solidarity, after premier Pallister told gathered media yesterday that his government has adequately consulted with impacted First Nations as it pertains to the yet-to-be constructed Lake Manitoba Outlets Channel. The premier also falsely claimed that the court ordered injunction against the province was overturned, when in reality, it remains in place.

"The province has appealed the injunction that the court imposed up on them in August of last year," explained Grand Chief Daniels. "Pallister is trying to convince the public that the injunction has somehow been overturned when his government is due in court on February 19. Let me stress that the injunction absolutely has not been overturned. Last summer, the court found that his government's actions could cause irreparable harm to First Nation Treaty rights and that has not changed."

Not only were the premier's statements on the matter blatantly false, they are also being disputed by the federal government in addition to the affected First Nations. In published reports, the federal Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna expressed that the province has been negligent in its duty to consult with First Nations and that her government cannot proceed with its funding commitment until that mandate is fulfilled. The project costs have been estimated at a total of \$540 million, and the costs are meant to be shared between the federal and provincial governments.

"This is an ongoing battle with this current provincial administration and it's getting tiresome," said Lake Manitoba First Nation Chief Cornell McLean. "All too often we hear the premier talking about teamwork and using other sports analogies. I can say with absolute confidence, this man has shown no interest in taking a team-like approach with First Nation people."

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Yesterday, the province claimed in a press release that they have had 174 consultation meetings with Indigenous communities and other impacted groups regarding the project. They also claimed to have signed fully funded consultation agreements with eight First Nations.

“That in no way has been our experience,” asserted Chief McLean. “Every once in a while, we will get a phone call or a token visit from the premier or one of his ministers. These have been merely gestures and in no way amount to any kind of meaningful consultation or cooperation.”

SCO notes the provincial government is bound by its own legislation. *The Path to Reconciliation Act* clearly states that all government departments must take the necessary steps to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in order to build trust, affirm historical agreements, address healing, and create a more equitable and inclusive society. Clearly, when it comes to the Lake Manitoba Outlet Channel, as well as many other projects that will have an impact on Indigenous communities, the act is not being adhered to.

“Let’s take out the financial microscope and look directly at the actual bottom line,” continued Grand Chief Daniels. “This premier’s dismissive actions towards First Nations not only have ramifications when it comes to accessing critical federal funds, but they could lead to a number of other major infrastructure projects never being completed. That has a negative financial impact on all Manitobans.”

“At the end of the day the duty to consult is not up for negotiation or creative interpretation,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “Our Relatives at the IRTC have stated it’s never too late to do the right thing and that they are still wanting to work with the province in a fair and equitable manner. When it comes to Brian Pallister though, you will forgive me if I do not share that same optimism.”

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The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples’ inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

For Media Inquiries:

Caitlin Reid, Manager of Communications, Southern Chiefs’ Organization

(204) 557-2399 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca

www.scoinc.mb.ca