

# **KASKA TRIBAL COUNCIL**

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

For immediate release: February 27, 2002

### **KASKA NATION URGES SENATE TO RECONSIDER BILL C-39**

WATSON LAKE, YUKON – Representatives from the Kaska Nation met with the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources on February 21 to explain concerns about Bill C-39, the new Yukon Act. The proposed Bill would provide the Yukon Government with authority over public lands, resources and waters in the Yukon that were previously the responsibility of the federal government. The House of Commons passed Bill C-39 on December 3 and it is now before the Senate.

“Bill C-39 fails to protect our basic rights and interests,” said Kaska Tribal Council chief Hammond Dick. “We appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources and we are hopeful that they will either recommend that Bill C-39 is not enacted, or that it be amended to make it clear that it does not apply to our unsundered traditional territory.” The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs previously refused a request by the Kaska to speak to the proposed bill.

The Kaska Nation maintains that the bill does not honour agreements that were negotiated with the Yukon Territorial Government and the Government of Canada. The Kaska Tribal Council and the Government of the Yukon signed an Accord in 1997 that stated that devolution would not apply to the traditional Kaska territory before a land claim was settled.

“Canada has an obligation to settle our outstanding land claims and must do so before they pass the jurisdiction over lands and resources to the Yukon,” said Kaska Nation chief negotiator Dave Porter.

In 1992, without providing notice to the Kaska, the federal government agreed to changes to the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement dealing with the Kaska Dena Council’s land claims. That agreement and the proposed Bill C-39 combine to give the Yukon Territorial Government a veto over the settlement of the Kaska’s long-standing transboundary claim.

(MORE)

The Kaska Nation includes five First Nations in the southeast Yukon and northern British Columbia. Their traditional territory covers 25 per cent of the Yukon about 10 per cent of B.C. The Kaska Dena have been negotiating their land claim with the federal government for almost 30 years -- their land claim is part of the first comprehensive claim accepted by Canada in under its 1973 policy.

-30-

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