

IPPERWASH INQUIRY COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Wednesday, June 21, 2006
7:00-8:30 p.m.
Thedford Arena

NOTES

The following notes reflect some of the discussion at the consultation. The opinions expressed at the consultation and reflected in these notes are those of the participants and not necessarily those of the Ipperwash Inquiry or the Inquiry Commissioner. The Commissioner will review the comments when he writes the Inquiry report and makes recommendations to help avoid violence in similar circumstances in the future. However, in making his findings of fact, the Commissioner will not consider the comments by participants to be evidence.

Nye Thomas opened the meeting by introducing the members of the Commission in attendance, and thanking the Mayor for organizing the consultation. He went on to describe, in brief, the function and progress of the Part I proceedings in Forest, and to outline the ground rules for the consultation. Participants were asked to refrain from commenting directly on the events of September, 1995, in order to preserve the procedural protections attached to the Part I proceedings, where those events were being examined. Nye indicated that Commission members would not be commenting on those events, either, as the Commissioner and Commission staff needed to remain impartial about the facts until the report came out.

The Commissioner thanked those present for attending. He indicated that it was important for the Commission to hear what the community had to say, and that the Commission was here to listen and learn. He outlined his background and reiterated Nye's comment that we could not say too much too soon, publicly.

He spent some time describing the nature of Inquiries, which allow Commissions to look at an incident like Ipperwash, at the history that preceded the incident, and towards the future. He described his mandate as making recommendations aimed at avoiding violence in similar circumstances in the future, and told participants that we were seeking input on those recommendations.

He concluded by commenting that the Commission had a great concern that our proceedings would stir up painful memories and make matters worse in the community. He described one of the Commission's objectives is to contribute to healing in the community, and it was our hope that the community would be better off when the Commission left the community than when it arrived.

Nye Thomas outlined the issues where the Commission was seeking the community's views, including relationships with police, how neighbours can better live together, and how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities can live alongside one another. He acknowledged that some people have concerns about the role of governments in confrontations of this kind.

Several of the participants had prepared lists of recommendations. These included:

- *Police and government should do a better job of communicating with area residents:* Participants described not knowing what was going on during or since September, 1995, which appeared to greatly contribute to their anxiety and anger about these events, and their sense that they had been abandoned by police and government. Participants were promised that fact sheets would be distributed about the progress of the land claim negotiations, and that public meetings would be held. None of this has occurred, and area residents have not been kept informed about the progress of negotiations, and do not know what is happening or will happen with the Army Camp or Park. The possibility of the use of a recorded police hotline or pamphlets was raised by Nye. The Mayor of Bosanquet Township, Cam Ivey, suggested that municipal governments were an ideal point of contact for the distribution of information, as most area residents know how to get in touch with their mayor or city councilors. Federal and provincial representatives are less accessible.
- *Land claims and disputes should be resolved in a timely fashion:* Participants suggested that the length of time it takes to settle land disputes leads to confrontations. Any impediments to the resolution of disputes should be dealt with promptly. The delay in the federal government returning the land at Stoney Point was viewed by some residents as being the cause of the situation.
- *Education:* Several participants suggested that the Canadian public should become more educated about the history and about the historical basis for land claims and property ownership, in particular, as well as the need to foster more acceptance of marginalized people, through the education system. It was suggested that this would lead to better relations between neighbours and communities.
- *The rule of law must be observed in land disputes:* Some participants made reference to a double standard or system of law being applied to Aboriginal people, and suggested that Aboriginal people should be arrested and charged for activities that would lead to the arrest of a non-Aboriginal person. Derry Millar observed that the colour of right was an integral part of the rule of law, which might mean that a protestor should not be arrested. A participant responded that some of the activities of protestors went beyond those which should be considered protected by colour of right, such as harassment, thefts, etc.

- *Innocent third parties should be compensated if land disputes disrupt activities in adjoining communities:* Several participants described the negative affect the events of September, 1995, had on their property values. The events themselves disrupted business, employment, and medical treatment. In the aftermath of the events, participants described losing businesses because of diminished property values, and the refusal of banks and insurers to provide credit or insurance to homeowners, which one participant attributed to the lack of police protection afforded by the OPP to property owners during the period immediately following September 6, 1995. The closure of the Park had a tremendous economic impact on the area.
- *Police should ensure that area residents not directly involved in the dispute continue to have access to police services and protection*
- *Preservation of evidence:* Political and government staff should be required to preserve their notes and all possibly relevant evidence until all legal proceedings arising from such disputes are resolved, and the destruction of any evidence should be considered a crime. Police officers should be required to make notes prior to going off shift. All Command Centre lines should be recorded.
- *Police should not be permitted to instruct ambulance personnel about where they can or should go, or what they should do*
- *Racial profiling and the attitudes and activities of area OPP officers should be investigated:* One participant reported that her family members had been harassed and assaulted by OPP officers, and that she had heard from other area residents about similar incidents, which she believes were attributable to racial profiling. Her experiences led to her better understanding of what the George family and Aboriginal people in the area experienced.
- *Aboriginal communities should be policed by Aboriginal officers.*

Although some participants described difficulties between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities before and after September, 1995, several others stepped forward to note that they and their families had always enjoyed good relations with local First Nations people. One man described his family having lived, peacefully, adjacent to Stoney Point for six generations. He noted that there were people living in the area who hated Aboriginal people, and did not understand Aboriginal culture or traditions. He believes that the OPP overreacted to the occupation of the Park, and that the Stoney Point people have got a “raw deal”.

Several participants attended Part I proceedings, and the Indigenous Knowledge Forum in 2004, and observed that they had learned a great deal from doing so.

Participants were reminded that the Inquiry’s proceedings, transcripts, and papers were all available on the Inquiry’s website.

