



Speaking Notes for
Johannes Lampe
President
Nunatsiavut Government

**Public Inquiry Respecting Ground
Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons**
Nain, Nunatsiavut
November 9, 2021

Please Check Against Delivery

- Thank you for affording the Nunatsiavut Government the opportunity to provide input into the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons.
- We acknowledge that this inquiry started as a result of the search for Burton Winters. We send our condolences to Burton's family, friends and community. We also extend our appreciation and respect to the Makkovik Ground Search and Rescue Team that did all it could, given the weather conditions and the resources available to them.
- We also want to acknowledge all of the Ground Search and Rescue volunteers who give freely of their knowledge and expertise when searching for fellow community members. We recognise that this can be stressful, especially when the result is not the one we may wish for.
- We welcome this much-needed inquiry, and are hopeful the findings that will emerge will lead to sound recommendations that will result in improved search and rescue resources and response times.
- In order to understand some of the issues being faced in our communities, it's important to know the challenges we face as Labrador Inuit and as a government.
- The formation of the Labrador Inuit Association in 1973 and its incorporation two years later, laid much of the groundwork for us today. From filing our first land claim in 1977, to the start of negotiations just over a decade later, through the ratification process and the signing of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement in 2005, we now have a strong government structure that has earned the respect of other governments, groups and organizations right across this country.
- We can attribute much of our success to our Land Claims Agreement, which sets out details of land ownership, resource sharing, and self-government. It provided for the establishment of the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area (or LISA), totaling about 72,500 square kilometres (or 28,000 square miles) of land and water and 48,690 square kilometers (or 18,800 square miles) of sea. The Agreement provides Labrador Inuit special rights related to traditional land use in this area.
- Within the Settlement Area, 15,800 square kilometers (or 6,100 square miles) is designated as Labrador Inuit Lands, which is owned by Labrador Inuit.
- The Agreement also provided for the establishment of the Torngat Mountains National Park, consisting of about 9,600 square kilometres (3,700 square miles) of land within LISA.

- There are five Inuit Communities within Nunatsiavut – Nain, our most northerly community, Hopedale, Makkovik, Postville and Rigolet. None of our communities are connected by road, or to other parts of Labrador. We rely on air service throughout the year, which at times is dependent on the weather, in order to transport people and goods. Marine services are provided on a seasonal basis.
- So, getting around Nunatsiavut is no easy task.
- The sea is our highway, and sea ice, in particular, is part of who we are as a people, which is why many Nunatsiavumiut sometimes refer to themselves as *Sikumuit*, which in English means *people of the sea ice*.
- In recent years, we have begun to see the impacts of climate change, as we are finding it more increasingly challenging to access sea ice to hunt and fish during winter and spring.
- Given our remoteness and vast geographical area, and impacts of climate change, improved ground search and rescue resources are critical to our people and our communities.
- Our most southerly, Rigolet is connected to the communities of Upper Lake Melville during the winter months via a groomed snowmobile trail. There is also a groomed trail between Postville and Makkovik.
- In recent years, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has placed markers on the sea ice from Happy Valley-Goose Bay to Makkovik/Postville. Once you get past Postville the trails are no longer groomed, but there are markers on the sea ice on to Nain. These markers, in some cases, have created a false sense of security. What we have seen is an increase in travel by people unfamiliar with the area who follow these markers, believing it will take them safely to their destination. There has also been more searches as some people are inadequately dressed or prepared for potential emergencies from this false sense of security. In addition to this, people who are following these markers may not know where it is unsafe to travel on the ice – there are many rattles (places that do not freeze or freeze over but are unsafe.) We have seen the areas where there is bad ice increasing due to climate change. In fact, the markers near Nain had to be moved this past year as they were near unsafe ice.
- The search and rescue teams in the Inuit communities are, for the most part, volunteers. They oftentimes have to cover vast areas of remote land and sea. As a result, logistical and operational approaches to searches are unique to other areas of the province.

- The Nain Ground Search and Rescue Team, for example, provides services from Natuashish to the northern tip of Labrador – the largest search area in the province with nearly 600 kilometres of coastline.
- Ground Search and Rescue teams in our communities often face issues with respect to the availability of volunteers – depending on the season and rotational work schedules.
- There are no helicopters or planes based in our communities on a permanent basis. In the event of an emergency or a search and rescue mission that requires air support, Joint Rescue Coordination Centre assets are deployed from Gander or Happy Valley-Goose Bay, if available. As a result, it can take many hours before any support arrives. It should be noted that any available aircraft of opportunity in close proximity of a search cannot be quickly seconded without approval through the multi-tiered process that has caused delays in past searches. On many occasions, there has been air support provided without fee by Air Borealis on the request of local team coordinators. This is implemented even before it is identified that air support is needed, as there may be aircraft in the area that can quickly eliminate many kilometers of search area.
- As per Chapter 17 of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the Nunatsiavut Government may make laws in Labrador Inuit Lands and the Inuit Communities in relation to emergencies and search and rescue services. However, we have yet to do so, mainly because we don't have the resources to manage these services.

Recommendations

- The Nunatsiavut Government is recommending:
 1. that there be a change in the Ground Search and Rescue process in Nunatsiavut of accessing federal or private aircraft be simplified, similar to that of a marine searches – one call to activate. The decision to activate air support and other resource should come from the local GSAR team coordinator and local RCMP authority once a missing persons file has been initiated, as they are the most familiar with the area and logistical needs. This new procedure could be developed in consultation with local Ground Search and Rescue Teams, the RCMP, the Newfoundland and Labrador Ground Search and Rescue Association, Emergency

Measures Organization and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre.

2. That there is a Cormorant aircraft stationed in Happy Valley-Goose Bay on a full-time basis.
 3. That consideration be given to have searches on the sea ice be treated as a marine search under the coordination of the Canadian Coast Guard.
 4. That more training for GSAR teams take place in the Inuit Communities using the resources that they have available to them.
- Again, thank you for this opportunity.