



What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Economic Development Sector advocates for economic policies and programs that respect First Nations self-determination in both the market and traditional economies of First Nations. The sector advocates for economic recovery, prosperity, inclusion, and sustainability. To this end, current advocacy efforts address trade and procurement, agriculture, natural resources, connectivity, cannabis, and gaming.

Agriculture: The Sector supports development and implementation of a First Nations Agriculture Strategy, articulating the need for enhanced participation and opportunities in the agriculture and agri-food sector, and with attention to both short- and long-term activities.

Cannabis: The *Cannabis Act* legalized and created a framework regulating the sale, distribution, and taxation of Cannabis for recreational use in Canada. As directed by First Nations-in-Assembly and the Chiefs Committee on Cannabis, the AFN advocates for recognition of First Nations jurisdiction.

Natural Resources: The AFN creates space for First Nations to exercise self-determination over natural resources in their territories and governing whether and how they should be developed. This includes ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from resource development. Specific work includes the *2 Billion Trees* (2BT) initiative, and clean energy development. Generally, AFN advocates that government policies and programs are sufficiently accessible, flexible, and responsive to First Nations' needs.

Procurement: First Nations-in-Assembly have acknowledged the importance of economic participation in procurement via **Resolution 38/2019, *Increasing First Nations Procurement Opportunities and Benefits***. Targeted Indigenous procurement under the federal Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business represents less than one percent of federal procurement. First Nations' enhanced access to procurement is essential.

How has the AFN's recent advocacy affected this area?

Agriculture: Completion of the 2020 Gap Analysis of Federal and Provincial Agriculture Programs and Services to First Nations Producers on Reserve Lands has provided baseline information for the development of a First Nations agriculture and agri-food strategic framework and identified barriers within the overall Agri-Partnership for First Nations. In 2020-21 the Economic Sector completed a draft First Nations Agriculture and Agri-Foods Framework, and a legal report that



sets out how a First Nations Agricultural Strategy can be founded upon inherent and Treaty rights as well as international law.

Cannabis: the federal government is currently preparing a three-year review of the federal Cannabis framework. Once commenced, the Minister will have 18 months to provide findings and recommendations to parliament. The AFN expects government engagement will begin within the next year, as indicated in Budget 2022. Budget 2022 also proposes launching a new cannabis strategy table to support ongoing dialogue with businesses and stakeholders in the sector. This will be led by the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED), and the AFN will advocate for the full and effective participation of First Nations.

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) programs are being developed pursuant to Canada's strengthened climate plan, *A Healthy Environment, and a Healthy Economy*. Recent developments include announcement of the development of a Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy for achieving Net Zero emissions by 2030. To reach this target, Canada plans to dramatically accelerate development of critical minerals both for use in Canada and for export. Relatedly, the creation of Regional Energy and Resources Tables with federal, provincial and First Nations representatives were recently announced. To support implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, NRCan is also engaging industry sectors on the development of a National Benefit Sharing Framework (NBSF).

Forestry: NRCan's *2 Billion Trees* (2BT) initiative has allocated \$500 million until 2031 for an Indigenous funding stream. The AFN is identifying the First Nations funding envelope, and how to support capacity building for First Nations governments, communities, organizations, and businesses.

Trade: Through 2021-2022, the AFN will focus on implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Economic Trade Cooperation Arrangement, an economic cooperation agreement developed jointly by indigenous peoples and representatives of Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Chinese Taipei.

Procurement: The AFN continues to advocate for increased First Nations procurement opportunities and benefits, and monitoring Canada's mandate to ensure five percent of all federal contracts are awarded to businesses managed and led by Indigenous peoples. Specific priorities include examining the definition of Indigenous businesses, and the merits of establishing a collaborative national procurement organization to support First Nations access to local, regional, and national procurement opportunities.



Where do we hope to go in the future?

The AFN will continue work with the Chiefs Committee on Economic Development (CCED) and the Chiefs Committee on Cannabis to enhance First Nations' economic involvement. This will include continued dialogue with Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada; Indigenous Services Canada; Natural Resources Canada; Innovation, Science and Economic Development; and Global Affairs Canada, to ensure integrated and transformative approaches to economic development policy and programming.

Cannabis: The AFN is currently developing a coherent engagement strategy for the three-year review of the impact of the *Cannabis Act* on First Nations. This will respect the different applications of legalization across regions, with a view to maximize opportunities to exert jurisdiction over cannabis as well as to benefit from legalization.

Procurement: to support Canada's achievement of a five percent Indigenous procurement target, the AFN will advocate for First Nations access to procurement supports and capacity, trade opportunities, quality data, and changes to the contracting environment; receive guidance on the potential for an Indigenous-led entity on procurement; and receive guidance on the definition of a First Nations business for the purpose of the 5% procurement target.

Connectivity: the AFN will continue advocating for specific connectivity funding, and criteria for providing access to connectivity initiatives and training for First Nations businesses to close the digital divide. The AFN will expand on previous analyses and reports instructive to the development of a First Nations connectivity strategy.

Finally, the AFN will support the full participation of First Nations in the implementation of *A Healthy Environment, and A Healthy Economy*, ensuring that environmental, economic and rights considerations are adequately reflected in its frameworks. The AFN will also advocate for equitable access to 2BT benefits and programs, and ensure First Nations representative institutions have control over selection criteria and processes.