

Establishment of the Indian Economic Development Fund (IEDF) in 1970 was a landmark in Indian economic development. The fund formed a financial base for the department's mandate to assist Indians to develop income opportunities and create employment. Capital was provided to Indian businessmen and businesses and basic management skills and technical expertise were made available. From the outset, an important provision of the fund was that Indians be involved in the design and delivery of economic programs.

During the fiscal year 1976-77, the Indian and Inuit program approved 1,021 loans for \$17.1 million and guaranteed 51 loans from private sources totalling \$2.5 million.

Main estimates during the fiscal year authorized about \$15.0 million in grants and contributions. The economic development branch has provided to Indian enterprises 588 grants and contributions for start-up costs totalling \$7.9 million. To help Indians establish their own enterprises, the branch, through the IEDF, assisted them with business planning and helped provide other professional and technical services. A total of 2,786 jobs were created in 1976-77. In the first six years of the fund's operation about 8,400 employment man-years were created. Financing was advanced to enterprises in agriculture, forestry, fishing and trapping, construction, real estate, manufacturing, transportation, communications and wholesale-retail operations.

The lands and membership branch is responsible for ensuring that treaty obligations covering lands and memberships are met and that statutory responsibilities under the Indian Act for membership and the administration and management of Indian lands are fulfilled. The branch also helps bands obtain maximum benefits from mineral resources on their own reserves.

Since 1969 the government has provided financial assistance to Indians and Inuit for research to support their claims to traditional interests in lands, and their rights under treaty or the Indian Act. Recognizing its lawful obligations, the government has undertaken negotiations with Indians and Inuit. Claims may be based on traditional use and occupancy of land in areas where the Indian interest has not been extinguished by treaty or superseded by law (comprehensive claims), or they may be based on interpretation of treaties and legislation, or the administration of assets (specific claims).

In 1974 an office of native claims was established within the department to represent the government in negotiating claims settlements; to advise the minister on the further development of claims policy and the processes for settling both comprehensive and specific claims; and to co-ordinate the government's response to claim proposals.

Comprehensive claims are based on the traditional use and occupancy of land. With such claims the government tries to redefine in contemporary terms the relationship between native people and the government. The settlement process for these claims has been under way since the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975. An agreement was also signed on January 31, 1978 with the Naskapis of Schefferville, providing them with rights and benefits similar to those gained by the James Bay Crees and Inuit of Quebec under the James Bay agreement, but adapted to the special circumstances of the Naskapis. Other major activity areas of comprehensive claims include the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Labrador.

Specific claims cover every aspect of the government's past administration of band lands and other assets, and the fulfilment of the terms of treaties. A major preoccupation in 1977 was treaty land entitlements in the Prairie provinces, the result of some bands not having received their full entitlement under treaties signed between 1871 and 1906. In Saskatchewan, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and the federal and provincial governments reached agreement in August 1977 on basic principles for settling outstanding treaty land entitlements. Efforts to reach similar agreements with Alberta and Manitoba continue.

Another specific claim was settled in December 1977 with the Manitoba Northern Flood Agreement which provides rights and benefits to five bands as compensation for the adverse effects of Manitoba's Lake Winnipeg and Churchill River diversion project. Other ongoing specific claims issues include lands cut off from reserves in BC since 1916, and alleged improper alienation of reserve land.