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Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)
Grand Conseil des Cris (Eeyou Istchee)

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Cree Nation Government
Gouvernement de la Nation Crie

Cree Nation Government

LAW

2023 Consolidation of the Act Respecting the Cree Language

Adopted September 17, 2019

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WHEREAS the Cree language of Eeyou Istchee was among the first Indigenous languages used in the lands that are now in Canada and those languages have evolved over time;

WHEREAS protection of Cree human rights requires respect for, and protection of, the Cree language and Cree cultural heritage, which are essential for the distinct identity and well-being of the Cree people;

WHEREAS the loss of Indigenous languages signifies not only the loss of Indigenous knowledge but also the loss of cultural diversity, biodiversity, and spirituality;

WHEREAS the transmission of the languages, cultures, practices, customs, traditions, ceremonies and knowledge of Indigenous peoples is integral to cultural continuity;

WHEREAS the future of the Cree language is largely in the hands of Cree families, but these families need support and encouragement so that the Cree language can flourish for present and future generations;

WHEREAS Cree-language media and lifelong learning of the Cree language, including the Cree education system in Eeyou Istchee, are essential to restoring and maintaining fluency in the Cree language;

WHEREAS it is the responsibility of the Cree Nation Government, the Cree School Board, Cree local governments and other Cree entities, as well as Cree families, elders and youth, to strive together in a spirit of cooperation and in diverse ways, so as to ensure that the Cree language is maintained, vibrant and strengthened for present and future generations,

WHEREAS in June 2019, the Parliament of Canada affirmed the need to respect the diversity of all Indigenous peoples, including the diversity of their laws, rights, treaties, histories, cultures, languages, customs and traditions,

WHEREAS Parliament further affirmed that Indigenous languages are fundamental to the identities, cultures, spirituality, relationships to the land, world views and self-determination of Indigenous peoples;

WHEREAS Parliament has underlined that a history of discriminatory government policies and practices, in respect of, among other things, assimilation, forced relocation, the Sixties Scoop and residential schools, were detrimental to Indigenous languages and contributed significantly to the erosion of those languages;

WHEREAS the Government of Canada is committed to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms rights related to Indigenous languages;

WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes that “all relations with Indigenous peoples must be based on the recognition and implementation of their right to self-determination, including the inherent right of self-government”;

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has affirmed repeatedly that section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 now includes a “full box of rights”;

WHEREAS the National Assembly of Québec recognizes the “right of the Amerinds and the Inuit of Québec, the first inhabitants of this land, to preserve and develop their original language and culture”;

WHEREAS in June 2015, the National Assembly of Québec unanimously recognized that Indigenous residential schools were “a tool of cultural genocide in regard to the Indigenous nations of Québec” and requested the “government of Québec and the government of Canada to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada”;

WHEREAS the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls upon “federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation” (Call to Action 43);

WHEREAS the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a consensus international human rights instrument, endorsed by Canada, and to which no country in the world is opposed;

WHEREAS, as affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international instruments, Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to preserve, use, develop, revitalize, and transmit to future generations their own histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies and systems of knowledge;

WHEREAS that United Nations Declaration further affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons;

And whereas particular attention is needed to take into account the rights and special needs of Cree elders, women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, and gender-diverse persons and two-spirit persons;

AND WHEREAS 2019 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year of Indigenous Languages to, among other things, draw attention to the critical loss of Indigenous languages and the urgent need to maintain, revitalize and promote Indigenous languages;

Now, therefore, the Cree Nation Government, enacts as follows:

1. **Short title**

This Act may be cited as the Cree Language Act.

2. **Interpretation**

Definitions The following definitions apply in this Act. Commissioner means the Cree Language Commissioner appointed under section 13. Cree Language refers to the Cree language spoken in each of the communities of Eeyou Istchee, referred to as either Iyiyuu-Ayimuwin or Iinuu-Ayimuwin in the language itself. Cree Nation Government refers to the Cree Nation Government of Eeyou Istchee. Office means the Office of the Cree Language Commissioner in Eeyou Istchee.

3. **Rights of Indigenous peoples**

This Act is to be construed as upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and not as abrogating or derogating from them.

4. **No forced assimilation or destruction of Cree culture**

Nothing in this Act is to be construed as allowing impairment of the right of the Cree people and Cree individuals to not be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

Purposes of Act

5. **Purposes of Act**

The purposes of this Act are to

(a) support and promote the use of the Cree language;

(b) support Cree efforts to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen the Cree language, including efforts to

(i) assess, from time to time, the status of the Cree language and existing challenges,

(ii) plan initiatives and activities for restoring and maintaining fluency in the Cree language,

(iii) create technological tools, educational materials and permanent records of the Cree language, including audio and video recordings of fluent speakers of the languages and written materials such as dictionaries, lexicons and grammars of the languages, for the purposes of, among other things, the maintenance and transmission of the languages,

(iv) support the Cree language learning and cultural activities, including language mentorship, language nest and immersion programs, and promote, restore, or maintain the essential links that exist between Cree language and culture,

(v) support entities specialized in the Cree language, and

(vi) undertake research or studies in respect of the Cree language;

(c) establish a framework to facilitate the effective exercise of the rights of the Cree that relate to the Cree language, including by way of agreements or arrangements referred to in subsection 5(e) and section 8.

(d) establish measures to facilitate the provision of adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of the Cree language;

(e) facilitate cooperation with the federal, provincial and territorial governments, other Indigenous governments and organizations and other entities in advancing Cree language objectives under this Act;

(f) facilitate collaboration with language research institutes and/or relevant universities in Canada and other countries to establish working relationships or partnerships in advancing Cree language objectives under this Act; and

(g) advance the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other relevant international human rights law, as they relate to the Cree language.

Rights Related to the Cree language

6. The rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 include rights related to the Cree language. For greater certainty, "rights related to the Cree language" includes Cree language rights.

7. The Cree people of Eeyou Istchee have the inherent right to the use and enjoyment of the Cree language, and positive action is necessary to protect and promote the Cree language and Cree cultural expressions.

8. The Cree people and Cree individuals have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures. They also have the right to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

9. The Cree people and Cree individuals have the right to establish their own media in the Cree language and, in this regard, to enter into agreements with the federal and Québec governments.

Powers, Duties and Functions of Director of Social and Cultural Development

10. Consultations – adequate, sustainable and long-term funding

The Director of Cultural and Social Development must consult with other Cree entities, in order to meet the objective of providing adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of the Cree language. Such Cree entities include, inter alia, the Cree School Board, Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute, and Cree local governments in Eeyou Istchee.

11. Cooperation to support the Cree language

The Director of Social and Cultural Development may cooperate with federal, provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous governments or other Indigenous governing bodies, Indigenous organizations or other entities — including by entering into agreements or arrangements with them — in arranging for Indigenous student exchange programs or ways to coordinate efforts to efficiently and effectively support the Cree language in Eeyou Istchee.

Cree Nation Government Institutions

12. Translation and interpretation

A Cree Nation Government institution may cause

(a) any document under its control to be translated into the Cree language; or

(b) interpretation services to be provided to facilitate the use of the Cree language in the course of the Cree Nation Government's activities.

Office of Commissioner of the Cree Language

Establishment

13. Office established

There is established an office, to be known as the Office of the Commissioner of the Cree Language, consisting of the Commissioner and his or her employees.

14. Appointment of Commissioner

On the recommendation of the Director of Social and Cultural Development made after the Director of Social and Cultural Development has consulted with diverse Cree entities, the Board/Council of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Nation Government is to appoint a Commissioner of the Cree language to hold office during good behavior for a term not exceeding five years, subject to removal by the Cree Nation Government at any time for cause.

15. Remuneration

The Commissioner is to be paid the remuneration determined by the applicable salary scales and expense reimbursement policy applicable of the Cree Nation Government.

Mandate and Powers, Duties and Functions

16. Mandate

The mandate of the Office is to

(a) help promote the Cree language;

(b) support the efforts of Cree people to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen the Cree language;

(c) facilitate the resolution of disputes and review complaints to the extent provided by this Act;

(d) promote public awareness and understanding in respect of

(i) the diversity and richness of the Cree language,

(ii) the inseparable link between the Cree language and the cultures of the Cree people,

(iii) the rights of the people related to the Cree language,

(iv) the significance of those rights for Cree people, as well as for the general public,

(v) the negative impact of colonization and discriminatory government policies on the Cree language and the exercise of those rights, and

(e) support innovative projects and the use of new technologies in Cree language education and revitalization, in cooperation with Cree governments and other Cree governing bodies, Indigenous organizations, the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments.

17. Research or studies

The Office may undertake research or studies, or cause research or studies to be undertaken, in respect of

(a) the provision of funding for the purposes of supporting the Cree language; or

(b) the use of the Cree language, including for the purposes of measuring the vitality of those languages or identifying measures to restore and maintain fluency in those languages; or

(c) assistance in the carrying out of community assessments.

18. Support offered by the Office

At the request of a Cree community or a Cree government or other Cree governing body, the Office may provide support to the community or the Cree government or other Cree governing body in its efforts to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen the Cree language, including its efforts to

(a) create permanent records of the language, including audio and video recordings and written materials such as dictionaries, lexicons and grammars of the language, for the purposes of, among other things, its maintenance and transmission;

(b) establish certification standards for translators and interpreters;

(c) conduct community assessments in respect of the use of the language;

(d) develop and implement plans for reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining and strengthening the language; or

(e) engage with the Government of Canada or the Government of Québec to establish culturally appropriate methods of teaching and learning the language.

19. Business plan and budget

The Office must establish a business plan and budget for each fiscal year and submit them to the Director of Social and Cultural Development.

Community Governments, Regional Entities, Businesses, and Institutions operating in Eeyou Istchee

20. Cree Language Plans

Community Governments, Regional Entities, Businesses, and other institutions operating in Eeyou Istchee are requested to adopt a Cree Language Plan, which should include the following:

(a) the organizational measures, policies and practices that will be put in place to promote the use of the Cree language within their institution;

(b) the mandating of a staff member in each organization to oversee the development and implementation of language measures, policies, and practices;

(c) an indication of the numbers of the organization's staff that are or will be fluent in the Cree language and able to communicate with or deliver services to the public in the Cree language;

(d) any provisions that will be made to provide opportunities for staff to receive Cree language education, training and/or certification;

(e) the role that their institution will play in regional initiatives to sustain and promote the use of the Cree language;

(f) A timeline to implement the measures detailed in the plan.

21. Submission to the Office of Commissioner of the Cree Language

Cree Language Plans should be submitted to the Office of the Commissioner of the Cree Language so that the Commissioner may:

(a) encourage cooperation and coordination in the establishment of a regional Cree language maintenance initiative;

(b) establish and communicate best practices for language maintenance and promotion;

(c) identify, and work to eliminate, significant barriers to use of the Cree language in the workplace;

(d) advise the Cree Nation Government on the state of regional and local community efforts to promote the use of the Cree language;

Adopted: September 17, 2019

Paul John Murdoch, Corporate Secretary