

**Submission to the Standing Committee
on Human Resources, Skills and Social
Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA)**

Opportunities for Aboriginal Persons in the Workforce



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Canada's forest products industry is facing a shortage of employees, contractors and service providers.

In May 2012, the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) unveiled a new industry-led vision that outlines where the forest industry sees itself by the year 2020. One ambitious goal of Vision2020 is to renew our workforce with at least 60,000 new recruits, including women, Aboriginal people and new Canadians. Vision2020 is more than aspirational. It includes clear goals and metrics that we need to meet in order to succeed.

The sector faced a difficult few years during the recent economic downturn including the collapse of the U.S. housing market in 2008. As a result, some mills — both in Canada and the U.S. — were closed, and some jobs were shed. However, with strong renewed growth in demand from the U.S. and elsewhere, the industry is strengthening and it needs people who have the skills, knowledge and desire to work in a growing sector.

The forest products industry competes with other resources industries that are recruiting employees with similar skill sets. This has made retention as important as initial recruitment.

In many forest-based communities there is a long history of Aboriginal involvement in the forest products industry. One reason is a shared geography. It is estimated that 80 percent of Aboriginal people live in or near forested areas, while, by contrast, 75 percent of Canadians as a whole live within 160 kilometers (100 miles) of the U.S. border.

Today, the forest products industry is one of the top employers of Aboriginal people, directly or indirectly employing more than 17,000 Aboriginal people and does business with more than 1,400 Aboriginal businesses. These businesses typically employ 10–30 people, and some earn revenues of more than \$1 million a year.

Working closely with Aboriginal communities will help to ensure that both our industry and the Canadian economy thrive.

Constructive relationships are built on understanding

Constructive relationships between the forest products industry and Aboriginal peoples and communities improve the likelihood of success in attracting, recruiting and engaging a passionate workforce that includes Aboriginal workers, contractors and suppliers. Constructive relationships are built on a foundation of knowledge and understanding, followed by respect and trust¹.

Among several foundational steps in building constructive relationships, one key measure is cultural awareness training, which has the potential to enable more effective relationships with Aboriginal communities. As indicated by Douglas R. Eyford, Canada's special federal representative on west coast energy infrastructure, in his November 2013 report: "*some industries have adopted such training which promotes a greater awareness and understanding of*

Aboriginal culture, practices, and protocol” and “Canada should develop its internal capacity to engage effectively with Aboriginal groups and individuals by providing cultural awareness training for federal officials at all levels”ⁱⁱ.

Relationship-building outside the consultation process

FPAC respects the economic and cultural interests of Aboriginal peoples and encourages Aboriginal participation in the forest products industry. Growing recognition of indigenous skills and constitutionally protected interests in land and natural resources has led to an increase in Aboriginal involvement in forest land management decisions.

We agree with Eyford when he mentions at the very beginning of his report that *“relationships that prosper require a foundation of trust, built on constructive dialogue, understanding interests, and a commitment to find solutions”ⁱⁱⁱ*. When it comes to fostering opportunities for Aboriginal persons in the workforce, government and industry should look beyond single project opportunities, beyond industry-specific opportunities, and certainly beyond an economic centric perspective^{iv}.

Notably, it is important to recognize that *“Aboriginal communities view natural resource development as linked to a broader reconciliation agenda”^v*. Currently, Canada’s approach to consultation could be expanded in order to do more to create the appropriate discussions and relationships to address such an agenda, and increase opportunities for Aboriginal individuals to participate in natural resource industries. Weaknesses of using consultation as a primary tool to discuss projects include the *“inability to discuss cumulative effects beyond the context of a single project.” “Canada’s reliance on industry creates risk because companies have different cultures, experiences, and expertise in Aboriginal relations”*.

In that regard, it would be very useful for Government to further *“define and articulate its view about the Crown’s and industry’s respective roles and responsibilities with respect to the duty to consult”^{vi}*.

Culture of long-term relationship-building over large landscapes

The forest products industry has a long history of engaging and partnering with Aboriginal peoples. We would like to see the government build on this culture and experience in Aboriginal relations. In our sector’s experience, a long-term perspective while discussing very large landscapes has favored the development of constructive relationships.

The forest products industry could help in discussions of land stewardship across large landscapes in which a variety of interested parties participate by bringing *a long term and sustainable* perspective. This challenge is at the core of the forest sector day-to-day operations in the 234.5 million hectares of commercial forests where we operate and plan for periods expanding beyond 100 years.

If Government were to establish – as recommended by Eyford – “*a joint initiative with Aboriginal groups for environmental stewardship*”^{vii}, thought should be given to providing a role for the forest industry as well as other groups and projects that have experience and expertise in large scale, long term, sustainable landscape stewardship. Such environmental stewardship initiatives could also prove to be one of the most efficient ways to approach species at risk issues, notably in a context in which a multitude of species with different needs are present in a given landscape.

In addition to being an essential component of land-use decisions, a long-term perspective is also desirable to create workforce opportunities. “*Aboriginal groups seek long-term employment and business opportunities for their members [...] they want careers, not short-term jobs*”^{viii}. Due to the nature of forest management activities, this sector provides opportunities for long term employment, rather than employment in short-term projects.

FPAC is supportive of the Eyford recommendation that “*Canada, Aboriginal communities, and industry [to] create a forum to share best practices about successful training, employment, and procurement initiatives to improve Aboriginal training and employment outcomes*”^{ix}. In fact, FPAC is currently reviewing and assembling best practices on hiring and retaining Aboriginal people. This work could be shared in such a forum.

Programs for Aboriginal education, training and employment

Government should play a key role by funding aboriginal education, pre-employment skills development, and skills training in a manner that is sufficiently flexible to address chronic barriers to employment. As mentioned above, this should be a component within a broader approach to engagement and reconciliation rather than the primary focus to foster opportunities for Aboriginal persons in the workforce.

We note with concern, on this topic, that particularly useful programs for Aboriginal education, training and employment such as the Skills and Partnership Fund, and the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (“ASETS”) are fully allocated until the end of 2015.

We are very supportive of the statement on February 17, 2014 of the Minister of Employment and Social Development, Jason Kenney, when he mentioned that one of the industries that can “*help Aboriginal Canadians fully realize their potential and make good livelihoods [...] is that whole area of natural resources*”. However, this statement was made in the context of federal government investment in training for pipelines under the Skills and Partnership Fund for Aboriginal training program. Such programs, which allows the government to partner with specific companies, are a great tool that should be maintained and government should make sure to keep it open to all resource sectors.

This inclusiveness would be essential not only for the prosperity of all natural resource sectors including the forest industry; it would also ensure more respectful relationship-building with Aboriginal communities. For relationships to be founded on trust and understanding of interests, it is important to recognize that Aboriginal people wish to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development. If programs were to unduly restrict the ability of Aboriginal peoples to

engage in one sector over another, it might limit their capacity to freely determine the economic development they wish to pursue.

Programs for Aboriginal education, training and employment could, in some occasions, facilitate partnerships and good relations by being accessible both by Aboriginal groups and industries (rather than be only accessible by Aboriginals).

For its part, FPAC has proactively tried to build relationships by offering the Aboriginal Forest Products Business Leadership Award in partnership with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business to recognize and celebrate selected Aboriginal entrepreneurs for their success in a forest products business. The FPAC Skills Award for Aboriginal Youth recognizes and celebrates selected Aboriginal youth for their skills development and career aspirations in the revitalized forest products industry. FPAC has also set up thegreenestworkforce.ca, which includes outreach to Aboriginal youth.

Consolidated list of recommendations:

1. Government and Industry should develop internal capacity to engage effectively with Aboriginal groups and individuals by providing cultural awareness training.
2. Government should further define and articulate its view about the Crown's and industry's respective roles and responsibilities with respect to the duty to consult.
3. Government and other natural resources industries should build on the forest products industry culture and experience in Aboriginal relations.
4. Government should establish a joint initiative with multi-sector industries, Aboriginal groups and other interested parties for environmental stewardship.
5. Government should facilitate the creation of a forum for Aboriginal communities, Government and industry to share best practices about successful training, employment, and procurement initiatives to improve Aboriginal training and employment outcomes.
6. Government should play a key role by appropriately funding Aboriginal education, pre-employment skills development, and skills training in a manner that is sufficiently flexible to address chronic barriers to employment. Such programs should be open to all resource sectors.

About FPAC

The Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) is the voice of Canada's wood, pulp and paper producers nationally and internationally in government, trade, and environmental affairs. Canada's forest products industry is a 57 billion dollar a year industry that represents 12% of Canada's manufacturing GDP. The industry is one of Canada's largest employers, operating in

200 forest-dependent communities from coast to coast, and directly employing 230,000 Canadians across the country.

Sources:

- i The Business Link, 2009, *Finding and Keeping Aboriginal Employees; A Handbook for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses*. p.13
- ii Eyford, R. D., 2013. *Forging Partnerships Building Relationships; Aboriginal Canadians and Energy Development*. p.44
- iii *Idem*, p.12
- iv *Id.* p.36
- v *Id.* p.1
- vi *Id.* p.53
- vii *Id.* p.51
- viii *Id.* p.8,23
- ix *Id.* p.52