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PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

THE DENE NATION STATES, YUKON DID IT. NUNAVUT DID IT. THE GNWT HAS NO EXCUSE.

Dene Nation lays out practical fixes and expects them in place before major project contracts are awarded

[NOVEMBER 5, 2026, YELLOWKNIFE, DENENDEH] – The Dene Nation is calling on the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to follow Yukon and Nunavut and give Indigenous-owned businesses a real advantage on government contracts now, before the next wave of major projects gets underway.

The GNWT's Business Incentive Policy (BIP) adjusts bids by up to 15% for NWT content and up to 5% more for local content but gives nothing for Indigenous ownership. GNWT's own contract reports show that from 2022-23 to 2024-25, more than half a billion dollars in contracts went to businesses outside the NWT, and that their share of contract dollars rose from 24% to 43%.

"Northern is not the same as Indigenous," said Dene National Chief George Mackenzie. "When a road, a school or a power line is built on Dene land, Dene businesses should be first in line. Right now, the GNWT does not even publish how much of its contracting goes to Indigenous businesses."

In a 2024 report tabled in the Legislative Assembly, Finance Minister Caroline Wawzonek wrote that the GNWT was "moving forward with the development of an Indigenous Procurement Policy." This summer, after engaging in the policy since 2021, the GNWT confirmed it is not proceeding with one, citing a lack of consensus. It adopted a definition of an NWT Indigenous business instead, but "for information and reporting purposes only."

Yet its own What We Heard report found "broad support" for putting local Indigenous businesses first on contracts under $25,000, and that a 5% bid adjustment for Indigenous businesses "was generally supported." In June, Wawzonek herself said engagement showed "a strong interest in Indigenous participation in procurement."

"The GNWT asked. Northern businesses answered," said Dene National Chief Mackenzie. "The support is there. What is missing is the will to act."

The stakes are rising. Ottawa has referred three NWT projects to its Major Projects Office: the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Taltson Hydro Expansion and the Arctic Economic and Security Corridor. In September, it committed $405 million to the Mackenzie Valley Highway, including construction of the Great Bear River Bridge near Tulita.

"Major projects are just around the corner, and they run through Dene lands," said Dene National Chief Mackenzie. "The rules have to change now, before those contracts go out."

Working models next door:

- **Yukon:** Yukon First Nations businesses get bid value reductions of 5%, 10% or 15% based on ownership, plus 5% when those outside Whitehorse work in their traditional territory. Wages paid to Yukon First Nations workers earn a 15% reduction, and some competitions are limited to Yukon First Nations businesses.
- **Nunavut:** The NNI Policy, which carries out Article 24 of the Nunavut Agreement, gives Inuit firms bid adjustments of 5%, 10% or 15% based on Inuit ownership, on top of Nunavut and local business adjustments.

The Dene Nation expects the GNWT to reverse its decision and work with Indigenous governments to:

- **Use its own definition:** It now has one. Add a BIP bid adjustment for NWT Indigenous businesses, scaled to ownership, as Yukon and Nunavut do.
- **Reward work on homelands:** Add more when Indigenous businesses work on their own Nation's lands.
- **Count Indigenous jobs:** Give bid credit for Indigenous workers and subcontractors.
- **Set targets and report:** Set public targets and report results against them every year, starting in 2026-27.

"We are not asking for a handout, just a fair chance on our own land," said Dene National Chief Mackenzie.

Mahsi,



George Mackenzie,
Dene National Chief, Regional Chief AFN-NT Region

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