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**For Immediate Release**



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## **Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq Continue Work Towards Self-Determination at 2024 Nationhood Gathering**

The identity of the Mi'kmaq as a Nation is grounded in family roots and connections that have prevailed through time. It is through these roots and connections that the Lennox Island and Abegweit First Nations are working together to help determine the vision for L'nuey's rights-based work for current and future generations of the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq (Mi'kmaq of PEI).

The Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq are coming together for the third-ever Nationhood Gathering on February 1, 2024, to discuss visions for the future and chart a new course towards self-governance, and ultimately self-determination.

“Our aspiration is to co-exist in harmony as Treaty People in a way that allows us to maintain our distinct cultural identity and pursue the benefits of rights that belong to us,” said Chief Darlene Bernard of Lennox Island First Nation. “This work is the beginning of a new step in our journey toward genuine reconciliation, as our capacity within our First Nations has grown over the years and as Mi'kmaq, we have the ability to represent ourselves. Our self-governance is inherent and comes from within our communities when we unite and share our vision for the future.”

“Together, I believe we can create the foundations and structures required for Mi'kmaq self-government that will allow us to build a better system moving forward. We are not seeking favors, we justifiably expect that our rights and ambitions will be respected, in the spirit of peace and friendship,” added Chief Gould of Abegweit First Nation. “We are determined, we are confident in our history and our traditions, we understand our inherent rights, and we will consistently act in a spirit that advances our interests.”

The first Nationhood Gathering was held on September 28, 2019. It served as the launch of L'nuey and provided the first opportunity for PEI Mi'kmaq to gather and engage in discussions on the protection and implementation of Mi'kmaq Rights and what the future should look like for the Mi'kmaq Nation in PEI.

The event was very positively received and feedback from participants included requests to have the event annually. Unfortunately, COVID-19 prevented the opportunity to gather in large groups in 2020 and 2021, however, the gathering resumed in 2022.

Similar to the previous Nationhood Gatherings, the third Nationhood Gathering includes a visioning session that features facilitated table discussions to gather insight and guidance from community members regarding the vision for the future of the Mi'kmaq Epekwitnewaq (Mi'kmaq Nation of Epekwitk). Presentations have been organized to support thinking and discussions on the implementation of constitutionally protected Mi'kmaq rights, including self-government and self-determination, and what that could mean for the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq.

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**Media contact:**

Sean Doke at [sdoke@lnuey.ca](mailto:sdoke@lnuey.ca) or 902.330.4420

In addition to Nationhood Visioning, there will be discussion about reconciling Mi'kmaq Rights for the future in Epekwitk (PEI) – how the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq can go forward with resolving outstanding Mi'kmaq rights issues with the rest of the Island.

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Additional background:

- Through the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils, L'nuey is governed by the full First Nations leadership of the province (Lennox Island and Abegweit First Nations Chiefs and Councils).
- The Assembly is responsible for the work of L'nuey, including negotiation and consultation processes. L'nuey serves and supports the Assembly in these processes.
- The Assembly is also responsible for the governance development work to support the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq's inherent right to self-government. L'nuey is the PEI Mi'kmaq Rights-based organization, which has the technical resources to serve the growing negotiation, consultation and governance development needs of the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq.
- The Assembly provides direction to the staff of L'nuey for negotiation, consultation and governance development work.
- Any major decisions will be voted on by the Mi'kmaq of PEI. Additionally, the Assembly provides direction to the senior management of L'nuey and guides L'nuey in the execution of its mandate.