

Awareness To Action

**An OPS Forum on Working with First Nation and Metis
People**

A presentation by

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**(As delivered by Mike Lyle, general counsel and vice-president,
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engagement on the part of Colin Andersen)**

Thank you for this invitation. It's great to be here, in a room with people I have so much in common with.

I spent 22 years working in different ministries at the OPS before I arrived at the Ontario Power Authority.

Aside from working with some truly exceptional people, one thing that never ceased to amaze during my time at Queen's Park was the scope and variety of experiences I had there. Without going into details—duck tongues, harvesting eyeballs, a mile underground and 22 Sussex Drive. Not bad for an economist.

I've also had an opportunity—and even more so in this past year—to learn about how to build collaborative and trusting relationships with First Nations and Métis People.

On my way here today, I couldn't help but to think about some of the aboriginal files I have worked on.

It was early in my stint at the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. And one of the files I was working on was the Northern Ontario Medical School cabinet submission. Aside from proposing that the school would educate doctors willing to serve in remote regions, we were also pushing for a specific aboriginal component that would provide training to aboriginal physicians. I was lucky enough to present this submission to the Cabinet of the day.

That was about 10 years ago. When the school was nothing more than an idea sketched out on paper.

Fast forward to the meeting between the OPA and Métis Youth in Sudbury last August.

Between meetings, I had lunch with today's keynote speaker, Gary Lipinski. He was talking about his family, and his daughter's dream of becoming a paediatrician.

Rachel's now in grade 11, and trying to decide between medical schools. She has narrowed her list down to McMaster, one of the top institutions in the province, and another that opened only five years ago. Yes, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, which has campuses at both Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and Laurentian University in Sudbury.

I share this story because it's a reminder to all of us in this room that the work that we do impacts real people in important ways—even though we may never actually get to see it with our own eyes.

You start with something that's just a twinkle in your eye. It then becomes a briefing note, a cabinet document. And finally, one day, you have a hospital. Or countless other real life examples of the good work we do that touches lives.

In other words, there is a tangible connection between the policies and programs we help shape and real people.

We're incredibly privileged in our work. We get to work on things that really matter. Things that make a difference.

It's the nature of our political system that governments come and go. But as civil servants, as public servants, I was always fond of saying that we have to remember that we are the "stewards of the long term."

One thing that people don't always realize is just how many things factor into decisions being taken by government. Often it's up to public servants to recongize when the planets are aligning—and to be ready when those moments come. To be ready we have to keep our eyes on the horizon—or in other words—on the longer term.

And a big part of being ready is taking the time to build the relationships that will make opportunities come to life—to turn decisions into implementation and implementation into opportunity for the people and communities we work with.

Over the past year at the Power Authority, we've worked hard to realize our economic opportunities by strengthening our relationships with Aboriginal groups.

And I know that's one of the reasons you've come here today—to hear about what the Power Authority has done to foster stronger ties with First Nations and Métis communities.

In fact, I believe, what we have achieved over the past year provides a case study for other civil servants looking for ways to build their partnerships with Aboriginal peoples.

This afternoon, I'd like to share with you a few of the lessons we've learned along the way—notes from a year that was truly history in the making.

But first, I'd like to fill you in a bit on the background that set the stage for this newly enhanced working relationship.

As many of you already know, the past year has brought unprecedented changes to the electricity sector.

The passage of the Green Energy and Green Economy Act last May set Ontario on a very different course for the province's energy future.

The Act positions Ontario as a global leader in both conservation and renewable energy. Renewable energy that can be harvested through the first and most comprehensive Feed-in tariff program in North America.

The Act is expected to encourage billions of dollars of investment in Ontario's electricity sector and create 50,000 green collar jobs in its first three years. And serve as a

catalyst for the greening of other parts of the economy such as transit and vehicles.

None of this, of course, would be possible without the active participation of Aboriginal communities.

Many of Ontario's renewable energy opportunities are in the north. Harnessing green energy from the power of the sun, the wind, water—and even woodchips.

We do know, having just wrapped up the launch phase of our Feed-in tariff program, that there is overwhelming interest in renewable energy in Ontario.

Since launching the program October 1st, we have received nearly 4,600 applications representing nearly 9,000 megawatts of potential new renewable energy.

This includes about 3,400 applications for the microFIT program—projects of 10 kilowatts or less. About 1,200 of those applications have been awarded preliminary contracts.

We're also very pleased to say we have received 43 FIT applications from First Nation communities, representing more than 1,100 megawatts.

But our Aboriginal partners also play a key role in our electricity planning and transmission systems. In fact, five of the top eight transmission projects highlighted as priorities for development by Hydro One are in the north and involve our First Nation and Métis partners.

We also recognized that there were incredible opportunities, working with Aboriginal groups, to succeeding in our conservation goals—the most ambitious in North America, possibly the world.

By working with groups where conservation and respect for the land are hallmarks of their culture, we believe we will be able to meet—perhaps even exceed—our target of reducing

our peak consumption by 6,300 MW by 2025. That's the equivalent of taking one in five households off the grid.

At the OPA, we truly believe 2009 will be remembered as the year in which we not only transformed the electricity sector in Ontario, but also transformed our relationship with First Nations and Métis communities.

There were a number of firsts. From our Conserve the Light gatherings with elders and chiefs. To our youth forum. We've met at dozens of meetings in venues across Ontario to discuss long-term planning, opportunities in green energy, as well as conservation.

There's no question this enhanced relationship began with a directive from our Minister asking us to undertake enhanced consultations.

Our goal, however, has always been to go beyond our legal obligations. Although, the OPA certainly does respect the idea that the duty to consult is a fundamental matter of social justice. And that self-determination is paramount for Aboriginal peoples.

If you take away one piece of advice from my talk here today, I hope it would be this: Don't get bound up in legal interpretations of what is and isn't consultation. We weren't doing this because we had to. We were doing it because it's important to all of us.

Along the way, we learned that where you can find areas of mutual interest, you will make progress and build a more satisfying relationship.

But we also realized we could be more strategic in our approach. As part of our plan to strengthen ties and enhance communication, we created a separate department at the OPA for First Nation and Métis issues.

We understood from the outset that we needed to find new ways to listen to groups that were coming from different circumstances—groups that weren't always on the same page. That a cookie-cutter approach wasn't going to work.

We understood that we needed repeated meetings to really appreciate what was on our partners' minds. We understood that consultation could take many different forms.

We understood that we needed to talk. And listen. And talk some more.

We also began to appreciate the importance of involving our partners in the electricity sector in these talks. We found it exceptionally beneficial to bring the relevant ministries along with us on our consultations—MEI, Finance, Environment. Having all of the experts at one meeting was better for everyone in the talks. I can't emphasize enough how important this was to achieving our goals.

What I can say is that all of that talking—and listening—did pay dividends.

Aboriginal groups have had an extraordinary impact on the final design of our Feed-in Tariff program. Based on those consultations, our FIT program now includes special provisions for First Nation and Métis projects.

Those provisions include topped-up prices for renewable electricity, lower security deposits and loan guarantees. Those discussions also led to the establishment of an Aboriginal Fund to enable groups to participate and cover their up-front development costs.

And we know from recent submissions of interest in our Aboriginal Fund, that there are many more groups interested in becoming involved in the development of renewable energy.

All of this is very good news. Because I would argue that in this decade, the electricity industry is going to provide some of the best—if not THE BEST—real, tangible economic opportunities to the First Nations and Metis peoples of this province.

Even better than the boost many communities got from gaming revenues over the last few years.

Working on that file as deputy minister of finance also gave me additional insight into the cultural differences in our respective negotiating tactics.

We had signed a memorandum of understanding. We had a smudging ceremony to celebrate signing of a deal.

A year later, we were back at the bargaining table.

The moral to the story? Negotiations can last longer and take a different path than you might expect. It ain't over until it's over.

I'd like to leave this afternoon by reiterating one thought. By telling you just how rewarding it has been to work with our First Nation and Métis partners this year.

Yes, we still have a long ways to go. But we have a come a long way too. Those planets I was talking about earlier truly are aligning right now.

On a personal level, it's been especially satisfying and a reminder as to why I'm here—and why so many of us have chosen to devote our working lives to the public service.

We do it because we can make a difference. Because, by working with communities—like the First Nations and Métis partners—we can make Ontario a better place.

A more prosperous place.

For all of its citizens.

Thank you.