

APNQL

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
QUÉBEC-LABRADOR

AFNQL

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
QUEBEC-LABRADOR

250, place Chef Michel-Laveau, #201 | Wendake (Québec) G0A 4V0
(418) 842-5020 | reception@apnql.com | www.apnql.com

Opinion Letter

Bill 97: First Nations forced to suspend participation in high-level consultation table

As of July 22, 2025, the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador notes that, although the Minister of Natural Resources and Forests has publicly expressed a willingness to engage in a governments-to-government dialogue with First Nations with the intent of putting forward major amendments to Bill 97, she continues to refuse to make a clear and formal commitment to an appropriate process.

We are therefore compelled to suspend, with immediate effect and until further notice, our participation in the high-level consultation table. This decision reflects our firm posture: without concrete recognition of our rights and without a genuine commitment to co-construction, we cannot endorse this process.

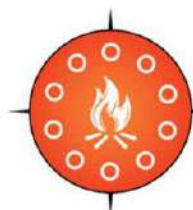
At the beginning of 2025, we clearly expressed our willingness to collaborate on the co-drafting of a new forest regime. To that end, we formally requested the creation of a high-level table that would allow us to participate upstream in its development.

To our surprise, however, Minister Maïté Blanchette-Vézina proceeded, on April 23, with the tabling of Bill 97, An Act mainly to modernize the forest regime — a bill whose very foundations are unacceptable, both in terms of the infringements on our rights and the threats it poses to the ecological integrity of forest territories.

Nevertheless, in a spirit of openness, we agreed in good faith to participate in the government's proposed version of a "high-level consultation table," in the hope that it would evolve into a true space for co-construction.

The two meetings held in May were intended to formally establish the terms and clear objectives that would guide the discussions at this table. Yet, despite the public posture of openness shown by Minister Blanchette-Vézina, her ministry has refused to commit to three core principles we identified as essential for meaningful dialogue:

1. Respect for our ancestral and treaty rights, as recognized by the Canadian Constitution and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly in matters of governance and economic development;
2. The establishment of true co-management of forests, on a government-to-government basis — not through an administrative delegation unilaterally defined by the state;



APNQL

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
QUÉBEC-LABRADOR

AFNQL

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
QUEBEC-LABRADOR

250, place Chef Michel-Laveau, #201 | Wendake (Québec) G0A 4V0
(418) 842-5020 | reception@apnql.com | www.apnql.com

3. The full withdrawal of priority forest management zoning, which is incompatible with our rights and has been condemned by a majority of experts.

These principles are neither ideological nor symbolic. They represent the minimum legal standards required for a credible process.

Moreover, the zoning principle, which lies at the heart of the current bill, would pave the way for a form of land privatization. This approach has been widely criticized — not only by us, but also by the scientific community, conservation organizations, and numerous actors in the forestry sector. The refusal to engage in dialogue on such a central issue clearly reveals a lack of genuine political will to enable collaboration.

Our rights cannot be confined to domestic, ritual or social activities, as the current bill suggests. Such reductive visions belong to another era. For more than forty years, the Government of Quebec has had a constitutional obligation to fully implement the rights of First Nations and, in that respect, a duty to uphold the honour of the Crown.

By refusing to commit to such fundamental principles, the Minister is closing the door on real dialogue. She leaves us no choice but to suspend our participation in the table, as we cannot lend credibility to a process that fails to recognize our status and responsibilities as Indigenous governments.

We remain open to dialogue, with the aim of reaching genuine balance, and will continue to work closely with civil society. However, this political table can only resume once the conditions for a good-faith, governments-to-government relationship are truly in place.

In good faith,

Chief Francis Verreault-Paul

Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

Members of the of the AFNQL Chiefs Committee on Forests :

Chief Lucien Wabanonik

Council of the Anishnabe Nation of Lac Simon

Chief Lance Haymond

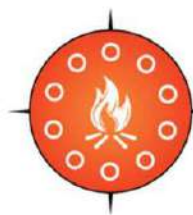
Kebaowek First Nation

Chief Sipi Flamand

Council of the Atikamekw of Manawan

Vice-Chief Jonathan Gill-Verreault

Pekuakamiulnuatsh Takuhikan



APNQL

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
QUÉBEC-LABRADOR

AFNQL

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
QUÉBEC-LABRADOR

250, place Chef Michel-Laveau, #201 | Wendake (Québec) G0A 4V0
(418) 842-5020 | reception@apnql.com | www.apnql.com

Vice-Chief Jérôme Bacon St-Onge
Innus of Pessamit Council

For information and interview requests:

Jérôme Gill-Couture
Political Communications Advisor
438-334-5742
Jgill-couture@apnql.com