

March 31, 2021

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Committee Members,

Re: Addition of Economic Clause to Preamble of Bill C-15

We are representatives from Indigenous organizations responsible for improving Indigenous participation in the Canadian economy. Our work includes facilitating business financing and ownership, workplace inclusion, Indigenous-related certification programs, economic research, economic development, and strategic advice to government. We write to you in strong support of government Bill C-15, respecting the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. For your consideration, we also write to recommend an addition to the legislation's preamble, to emphasize the Declaration's importance for Indigenous economic inclusion.

Specifically, on page 3 of Bill C-15, after line 2, we recommend the following addition:

“Whereas implementation of the Declaration affirms the importance of Indigenous rights for economic prosperity and whereas the Government of Canada must, through accelerated economic inclusion in partnership with Indigenous peoples and their institutions, remedy the disadvantages imposed on generations of Indigenous peoples by laws and policies designed to restrict access to rightful lands and resources, quality education, skills development, capital, infrastructure, and business ownership;”

We have some flexibility on the precise language, along these lines, as well as the clause's location. We also think that such a clause can help to advance Bill C-15, by refuting the false narrative of opponents that Indigenous rights recognition will deter economic inclusion. To the contrary, Indigenous rights recognition will establish investor certainty, clarity around community assets, and a framework for true business partnerships and Indigenous prosperity. Adoption of the Declaration will also send a powerful message to corporate Canada, helping to establish cultural norms that uphold Indigenous rights and economic inclusion, and encouraging private sector commitment to answering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 92 (Business and Reconciliation).

As a statement of reconciliation, we feel quite strongly that an economic clause should be included in Bill C-15. Canada has a history of purposeful economic discrimination against Indigenous peoples. This history includes the colonial destruction of traditional economies; the denial of Indigenous nations' access to rightful lands and resources; the misappropriation of Indigenous wealth by governments and private interests; the imposition of racist economic restrictions on individuals and communities through the *Indian Act*; political exclusion from the development of economic public policy; the policies and legacies of residential schools and related assimilationist programs; the inadequate funding of basic community services and infrastructure; and a lack of fair opportunities for quality education, skills development and access to capital.

These past policies have created ongoing barriers for Indigenous peoples to have full and fair participation in the Canadian economy, a huge opportunity cost for the entire country. A 2016 study showed that closing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada would result in an estimated increase in Canadian GDP of about \$27.7 billion annually, or about a 1.5% boost in Canada's GDP.¹ With Bill C-15, and effective implementation, the time has come to turn the page to a more prosperous and equitable future for Indigenous peoples, with benefits for all Canadians.

In making this submission, we understand that time is limited for your committee study of Bill C-15. We would also emphasize that this long overdue legislation must be prioritized for diligent passage. That said, we would be pleased to appear in person at your study or to otherwise engage with Committee Members at their convenience, in advance of your clause-by-clause process. Thank you for your hard work to advance reconciliation with this significant and important bill for all Canadians, and we trust that our recommendation regarding an amendment to the preamble will receive thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Tabatha Bull, President and CEO
Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business



Kelly J. Lendsay, President and CEO
Indigenous Works



Shannin Metatawabin, CEO
National Aboriginal Capital Corporations
Association



Chief Clarence Louis, Chair
National Indigenous Economic Development
Board



¹ "Reconciliation: Growing Canada's Economy by \$27.7 Billion." Prepared for the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board. November 2016. http://www.naedb-cndea.com/reports/naedb_report_reconciliation_27_7_billion.pdf at p. 15.