

Bissett discusses Canadian resource development

By BETSY BRENNEMAN
Staff Writer

Predicting that in three years Inuit Eskimos will make up 60 per cent of the labor force in northern Canada, Don Bissett of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development spoke on resource development in Canada in an address to the opening session of the 27th Annual Alaska Science Convention held Aug. 4-7.

He stated that the big issues in Canadian northern development are energy/mineral development and native land claims. Reporting that completion of the public hearings on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry is expected this fall, Bissett said that young and old natives have appeared to speak at the "intensive" sessions.

Bissett, who is head of the Pipeline Coordination Development Section of the Northern Program for the Canadian government, spoke to the Tundra Times later about the status of Canadian native land claims.

Having already told those gathered for the conference, which focused on resource development, that land claims raise the issue of "political development," Bissett reported that as always, there is a problem of communication in the issue. It is difficult for both the government and the native groups to make native communities cognizant and familiar with what is going on in terms of development of the land.

Inuit Taparistat, a group of central and eastern Eskimos, and COPE (Committee for Original Peoples' Entitlement) representing western Eskimos, formally submitted land claims in February of this year. Bissett

says they have asked for a response from the government within six months and that the government hopes that settlement can be achieved "in the context of pipeline applications."

Meanwhile, negotiations with Yukon people have been going on for two years. They are now stalemated, according to Bissett, because of an internal wish on the part of the people to review their position on land claims.

In addition, the Dene Declaration was made in May by the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territory which not only claims land rights, but includes concepts for self-government and resource development.

Bissett provided a copy of a comprehensive report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, headed by Justice Thomas R. Berger of the British Columbia Supreme Court. The inquiry has been conducted from March of 1974 until the

present at a cost of \$3,041,000 and is divided into four phases: I engineering and construction, II physical environment, III living environment, and IV human environment.

The report on the inquiry stated "a constant theme was the need for a settlement of native land claims before any decisions was made on the pipeline. Natives expressed concern for their land, their livelihood based on hunting, fishing and trapping, the future of their society and the breakdown of native culture in southern Canada.

Now it is its fourth and final phase which began in April, 1976, the inquiry has most recently travelled to southern Canadian cities from Vancouver and Calgary to Montreal and Halifax. Bissett reports that many of the southern-based interest groups supported a land claims settlement and a moratorium on development.

A tentative schedule issued

last month indicates that the inquiry will complete its hearings by October of this year. Bissett refused to make any further predictions on the course the settlement will take saying although Canada has learned some things from Alaska, the concept of land "ownership" is so varied everywhere and "as

all good bureaucrats, I can't make very astute comments on land claims."

However, he did conclude his address to the conference by stating, amidst all the difficult issues involved in Canadian development and land claims, "it is clearly a time for wisdom and good will."