

Mining and Natural Resources Law

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Province of Ontario and Matawa-Member First Nations Reach “Framework Agreement” in Ring of Fire

The nine Matawa-member First Nations and the Province of Ontario signed a “framework agreement” said to establish ground rules for negotiations between the Province and the Matawa-member First Nations to advance Ring of Fire opportunities.

Following a long period of false starts and little progress, the Province of Ontario appointed former Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada Frank Iacobucci to lead discussions in 2013 on behalf of the Province with the Chiefs of the Matawa Tribal Council on proposed resource development in the Ring of Fire. The Chiefs appointed Bob Rae as their negotiator. These negotiations are intended to address these priorities:

- Environmental protection and monitoring,
- Regional infrastructure planning and development,
- Resource revenue sharing, and
- Social and economic supports.

The Ring of Fire has mineral potential thought to be worth tens of billions of dollars and includes the largest deposit of chromite ever discovered in North America; however, development opportunities have been hampered by lack of infrastructure and difficulties in establishing dialogue amongst key stakeholders. Cliffs Natural Resources cited a lack of progress between the government and First Nations as a major reason behind its decision to suspend its \$3.3 billion Black Thor chromite project last year. Last month, however, Noront Resources initiated the co-ordinated environmental assessment process for its Eagles Nest project which includes nickel, copper and platinum group elements.

In a press release, the Province announced:

The agreement ensures First Nations and Ontario can work together to advance Ring of Fire opportunities, including regional long-term environmental monitoring and enhanced participation in environmental assessment processes, resource revenue sharing, economic supports, regional and community infrastructure.

While this may be characterized as an agreement to a process, it is a critical first step toward resolving uncertainties regarding development in the Ring of Fire.

For further information on this development, please contact any member of our Mining and Natural Resources Law Group.