

# Sahtu claim gets a big Yes!

by Chris Lambie

Northern News Services

Dene and Metis in the Sahtu voted overwhelmingly to accept their land claim deal last Friday.

Out of 879 ballots cast, only 110 people said no to the 40,000-square-kilometre, \$75 million package. That's a mere 10 per cent against, with an impressive 90 per cent of all eligible voters turning up to make their mark.

## *Leaders overjoyed as what could have been a close vote turned into a landslide*

"It's a big relief today," said Chief Everett Kakfwi from his home in Fort Good Hope Saturday morning.

Kakfwi was among the group of leaders who staged a last-minute information drive to persuade people to accept the deal.

"At the last public meeting

we had, we decided to stick together. Whether we voted yes or no, the important thing was to do it together."

Many people were asking questions just before entering the voting area, Kakfwi said, adding he thinks he may have opened a lot of eyes to the reality of the situation.

"Some people are dreamers, saying that we can get a better deal. But let's wake up. We know we have to share lands with the rest of Canada."

Campaigning for the deal until the last minute, Kakfwi didn't expect the vote would be so lopsided.

"I never expected the acceptance to be that high. When the final results came in I didn't really know what to

think."

George Barnaby, vice-president of the Sahtu Tribal Council, said the vote could have gone either way. But he's happy the Metis and Dene decided to vote as a bloc.

"To be realistic, I think people found this deal fair enough. It's a big step. And it

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# *Elders credited with getting voters out*

**Sahtu**, from A3

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feels really good to get over this hurdle and move on to the next.”

Kakfwi spent most of Saturday wandering the streets of Fort Good Hope broadcasting the news.

“It’s taking a while to sink in, but it’s definitely a weight off my shoulders.”

Now the Sahtu agreement heads to Ottawa for cabinet approval. No opposition is expected to the deal.

Sahtu MLA Stephen Kakfwi credits elders for getting people out to vote last week.

“The turning point was the Dene and Metis elders in the last few days, who said ‘some of us are very strongly in support of the claim and some of us have questions....’ But they encouraged everyone to take a position together.”

Western Arctic MP Ethel Blondin-Andrew said the mass acceptance lays all doubts and fears about the deal to rest. “Now they can get back to work.”