

Sahtu heads to polls for land claim vote today

by **Ronna Bremer**

Northern News Services

Sahtu leaders hope a last-minute information drive will guarantee a "yes" as the region's Dene and Metis start voting on their land claim today.

"A lot of people were still not fully informed on what is in the package," Fort Good Hope chief Everett Kakfwi said Friday.

"But there has been a lot of work done by the land claim group over the last few days."

George Cleary, president of the Sahtu Tribal Council, and members of the negotiating team spent last week in communities explaining the deal.

Kakfwi said he hopes the leaders' efforts will calm concerns about a lack of information on the 40,000-square-kilometre, \$75-million package.

Kakfwi tried unsuccessfully

to delay the ratification vote at a meeting late last month in Colville Lake. He wanted to put off the vote so it could be discussed more thoroughly at the community level.

He said people in his community told him they didn't know enough about the claim to feel comfortable about saying yes to the deal.

Cleary could not be reached for comment but did tell CBC it was too late to delay the ratification vote.

Kakfwi said he believes peoples' fears were alleviated by the Sahtu leaders' recent campaign.

"There has been a great, big turnaround," he said.

Kakfwi intends to vote yes on the claim and is confident others in his community will.

"This will be the only chance we have in this lifetime," he said.

Fort Good Hope has 282 eli-

gible voters, the longest list in the region's five communities. Fort Franklin has 275, Fort Norman has 186, Norman Wells has 45 and Colville Lake has 31.

There are 163 beneficiaries living outside the Sahtu region for a total of 982 votes.

Wayne McTaggart, ratification committee chairman, said beneficiaries voting by mail must get their ballots to the Sahtu Tribal Council office in Yellowknife by Thursday.

The Sahtu needs 75 per cent, or 492, of the registered voters to cast ballots and two-thirds of those must say yes to the deal for it to pass.

That means Fort Franklin and Fort Good Hope have the numbers to sway the vote.

Kakfwi said Fort Franklin has been ready since April to support the deal. His community has been a little slower to accept the package.