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## NEWS LOCAL

# Minister, SON chiefs say fish deal a new chapter



By Scott Dunn, Sun Times, Owen Sound  
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Local First Nations chiefs and the Ontario Natural Resources minister heralded their latest five-year commercial fishing agreement as one which marks the beginning of a new relationship between them.

"It's Earth Day today. What a fitting day to celebrate this agreement," said David Oraziotti, the Minister of Natural Resources, at the conclusion of the ceremonial signing of the fishing agreement, which has drawn so much attention since it was announced in March.

Oraziotti repeated his publicly expressed position that the Saugeen Ojibway Nation didn't need to enter into a fishing agreement with the MNR because they have a court-recognized

aboriginal treaty right to a commercial fishery.

But by entering into the agreement, the MNR obtained some safeguards to help ensure a sustainable fishery and compliance with the terms of this joint commercial fisheries management agreement, which is the government's interest, he said.

"As the Crown, we're responsible for the broader community's interest. And we're quite confident that they can peacefully co-exist, that the recreational sport fishermen, industry and associations and groups can prosper and can continue to enjoy recreational fishing as they've done for years."

That doesn't conflict with native right to the commercial fishery here, he said.

"We are the first government in the history of the province of Ontario to create a separate, independent Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. It's something that I think is long, was long overdue," Oraziotti noted.

Chippewas of Nawash Chief Scott Lee expressed his "deepest gratitude" at the comments from the Ministry of Natural Resources about the fishing agreement. "We've never heard that kind of commitment, those kind of acknowledgements of our rights.

"It's something many of our ancestors have fought for. Have sat at many tables to hear that."

Lee said he wanted to celebrate having this new relationship with the provincial government, "a partner that we can uphold and rely on."

Saugeen First Nation Chief Randall Kahgee stressed the agreement represented the fruits of a "government-to-government relationship."

All three remarked on the criticism from parts of the sports fishing community and local federal and provincial parliamentarians. The agreement allows native commercial fishermen to set nets in Owen Sound and Colpoys bays as of April 26 and after that year-round.

Setting nets in the bays is viewed by critics as an attack on the sports fishery, which relies largely on stocked salmon, rainbow and brown trout in the same waters plied by native commercial fishermen seeking lake whitefish. The agreement's stocking working group will examine impacts and make recommendations.

SON has a longstanding concern about the impact of stocked, non-indigenous fish into Lake Huron and Georgian Bay.

Lee echoed an ode Kahgee expressed to the memory of Chief Ralph Akiwenzie, a longtime Cape Croker chief and one-time professional teacher, who believed the cause of native rights would be served by continued efforts to educate people about them.

"I believe that that responsibility falls back on us as the leadership to come. To continue that educational piece for those who will listen and even for those who won't because maybe eventually they will come around with some acknowledgement of our rights. And I think this is a great step forward in what we accomplished here."

He said the benefits and opportunities from the agreement, for both native and non-native people, need to be highlighted and discussed. Part of the fishing agreement includes a commitment to do that. The first meeting of the governance committee is scheduled to take place today.

"There has been a lot of negative things said about this agreement. A lot of it uninformed. A lot of it very unfortunate. But we are committed to work with those who would want to work with us to understand that rich history we have in this place."

The connection to "the lands, and the waters and the resources" has sustained the community and will do so for generations, Kahgee said. "And it's that relationship that we always seek to protect. And we are grateful that we have a government that is willing to sit down with us in a spirit of reconciliation. I can't remember a time when that has been the case in a very long time."

Kahgee said "it's very easy for our people to mistrust the government because there is a dark chapter in our history. But we need to move beyond that. And we need to start looking at how we can reconcile and how we can continue to move forward and protect those things that are important to us."

Kahgee said he finds it "so fundamentally offensive" when he hears people say "Oh, the First Nations are going to obliterate the fishery . . . It's not in our best interest to see that resource disappear."

Kahgee said they have the right to fish commercially in local waters and opinion that doesn't acknowledge that "comes from a deeply ingrained ignorance, something that nothing I could never do, no one else could ever do could change that."

Rather than "pander" to those people, he wants to educate those willing to listen.

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## Poll

### Do you think the SON/MNR fishing agreement will damage recreational fishing in the Owen Sound and Wiarton area?

Tuesday, April 23, 2013

- Greatly
- Somewhat
- No

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