MUSKEG LAKE CREE NATION

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

UPDATES ON INHERENT AND TREATY-BASED SELF-GOVERNMENT

SEPTEMBER 2024

treatymanager@muskeglake.com (306) 466-4959 muskeglake.com

INTRODUCTION

Inherent, treaty-based self-government is one of the most important and impactful steps we can take as a community to exercise and reaffirm our right to govern our internal matters. When our ancestors signed Treaty 6, they believed that Muskeg Lake and Canada would have a government-to-government relationship. Inherent, treaty-based self-government is about upholding the original intent of Treaty 6. It will sever Muskeg Lake's ties to the Indian Act and will allow us to govern ourselves in a way that is rooted in Cree law and values.

A lot of questions have focused on: Why do we need self-government? Why can't we stay under the Indian Act? For over one hundred years, the Indian Act has governed our people in a way that does not represent or uphold the sacred promises exchanged at the time of Treaty. Under the Indian Act, Canada has the final say on all of Muskeg Lake's affairs, including education, health, and taxation. Muskeg Lake is required to follow European laws and structures and is accountable to both its citizens and to Canada. The Indian Act also leaves us with little financial security.

It is clear that the Indian Act cannot solve the challenges our community faces today, nor can it help us achieve our ambitious vision for the future of Muskeg Lake. Inherent, treaty-based self-government is the only way we can return law-making powers to our people while ensuring our government's laws grow and evolve with our community over time. Through self-government, Chief and Council will be guided by the citizens of Muskeg Lake to make decisions through our own government structures, and they will be solely accountable to Muskeg Lake's citizens. This is not only about righting a historic wrong; it is about securing a safe, healthy, and prosperous future for Muskeg Lake's next generation.

A second question that arises is: Are we ready? Self-government will provide Muskeg Lake with the financial certainty and transparency to move forward on long-term priorities, including community health and safety, child and family services, economic development, and the protection of our lands and resources. Despite all of Muskeg Lake's achievements, we are still at the whim of an outside government. The government has spoken about repealing the Indian Act, and Muskeg Lake leadership wants to be ahead of this. They want to hear from Muskeg Lake citizens, work with our kîhtê-ayak (Elders), our youth council and committees, and reaffirm a system of governance that meets Muskeg Lake's needs and addresses what is important to our people. Taking the time now to consult, and putting legislation in place that is led by our people and considers their concerns, will ensure Muskeg Lake's continued success.

TREATY DAY

Treaty Day was met with rainfall, but that didn't dampen the wonderful celebrations! Muskeg Lake members showed up in large numbers, and our Treaty Team enjoyed meeting with each member who approached our event table.

Our team thoroughly enjoyed the discussions that we had with our community members. Our members are the foundation of our Nation, and we look forward to many more opportunities like this to speak with you about self-government and what it means for Muskeg Lake in the future

MEMBERSHIP MEETING RECAP

Our team has had the pleasure of taking part in several community meetings over the past few months, with many more to come. We love sharing our vision for Inherent and Treaty-based self-government with the community and will keep you updated on opportunities to meet with our team at upcoming events.

Off-Reserve Committee Annual General Meeting

Muskeg Lake's Urban Committee annual meeting took place on June 8 and was well-attended by our off-reserve citizens from Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Calgary. Several leaders from our Nation were also in attendance.

The Urban Committee meeting is always a fantastic opportunity for engaging presentations and lively discussions on Muskeg Lake governance, Treaty, and our transition away from the Indian Act. Attendees took part in a series of talks led by the Office of the Treaty Commissionaire representatives on Treaty and the Indian Act, and it was a privilege to hear from Barry Ahenakew on the important topic of our Nation's history, culture, language, and geography.

Thank you to all who attended the Urban Committee meeting. We look forward to next year's meeting and discussions!

May Membership Meetings

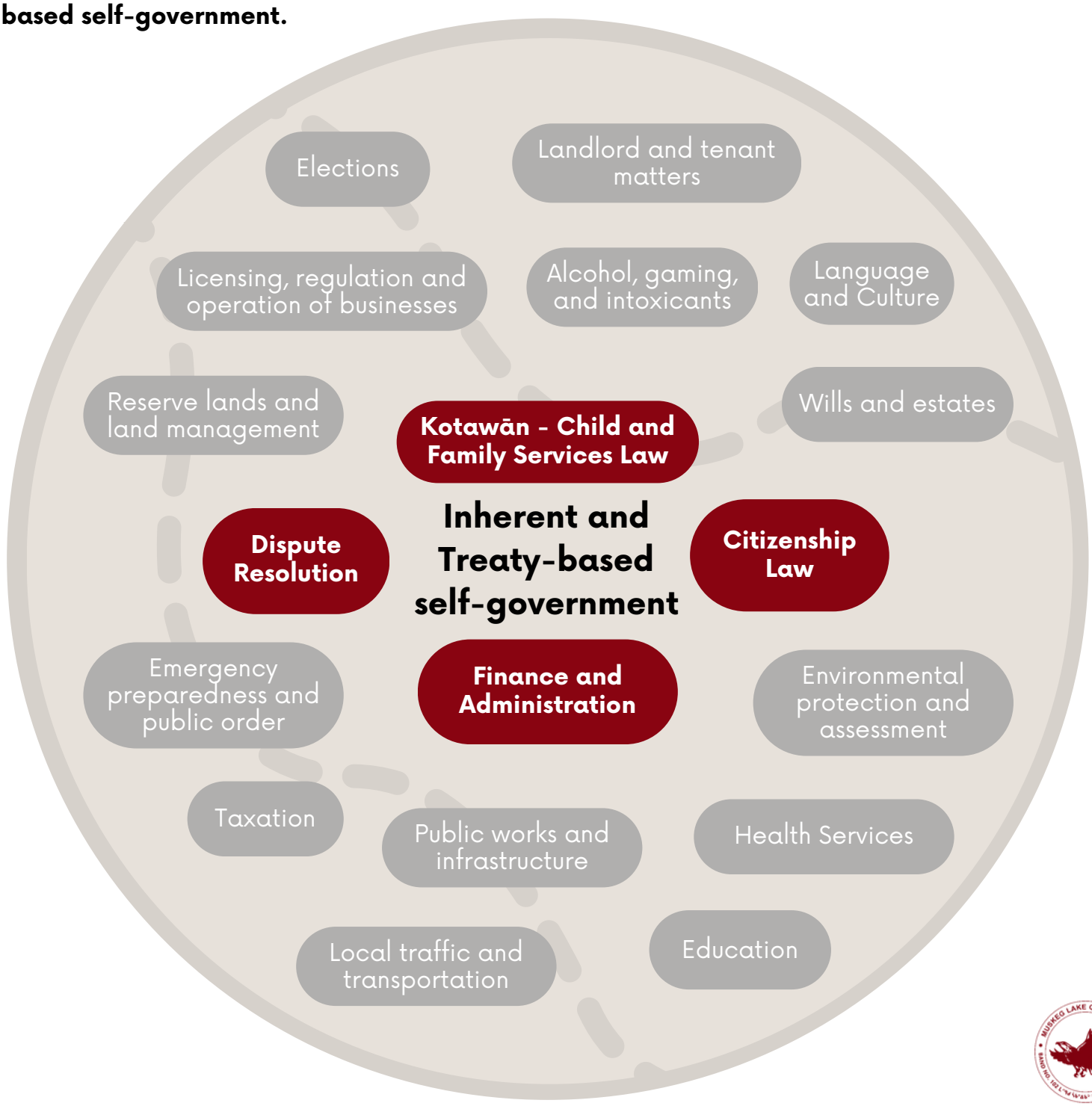
In the month of May, Muskeg Lake held our membership meetings. All four locations—Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Muskeg Lake—had a great turnout.

Our Treaty Team was onsite with a booth and had informative discussions with members about our self-government process. It is always a pleasure to share where we are now in the self-government process, and what our plans are for the future. In turn, our team received incredibly valuable feedback from our community on self-government and had the chance to discuss our work to date on affirming our jurisdiction under Child and Family Services (CFS) with citizens.

When we spoke with citizens, key topics that came up included citizenship, financial accountability, and the negative impacts of the Indian Act. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their thoughts on Inherent and Treaty-based self-government. At such a pivotal moment in Muskeg Lake's history, your questions and feedback are incredibly important and valued by all of us. We look forward to continuing the conversation at upcoming membership meetings and events.

INHERENT AND TREATY-BASED SELF-GOVERNMENT UPDATES

Inherent and Treaty-based self-government is an essential step in returning decision-making power to the citizens of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation. While self-government will allow Muskeg Lake to exercise our jurisdiction over a wide range of areas and responsibilities, as outlined below, we are currently focused on four immediate priorities: kotawān – our child and family services law; citizenship; finance and administration; and dispute resolution. **All of these governance areas fall within Muskeg Lake's approach to Inherent and Treaty-based self-government.**



Here is how we're making progress on Muskeg Lake's immediate priorities for Inherent and Treaty-based self-government:

Citizenship

Muskeg Lake is working to ensure that under self governance, the MLCN Government can preserve, promote, protect, and enhance MLCN's Cree culture, traditional knowledge, language, identity, and oral history through MLCN's citizens. After consultation with citizens, we can define our citizenship laws based on Muskeg Lake's own cultural rules, practices, traditions, family structures, and modern realities.

kotawān

Muskeg Lake's inherent right of self-government also includes jurisdiction over child and family services ("CFS"). MLCN is already advanced in taking back its legislative authority over CFS by making the kotawān Act, which affirms MLCN's jurisdiction and authority concerning the well-being of MLCN's children and families. This legislation will undergo further consultation before approval by Muskeg Lake's citizens. MLCN is currently in negotiations with Canada and Saskatchewan to enter into a coordination agreement to help ensure that MLCN's inherent right of self-government over the well-being of MLCN's children and families is effectively coordinated among the different levels of government.

Finance and Administration

Muskeg Lake has passed a law, recognized by the federal government, relating to financial management, the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Financial Administration Law, 2018. Under a new Governance Act, Muskeg Lake's ability to create laws concerning its internal financial management, which includes establishing policies, regulations, and procedures, making decisions regarding MLCN public funds, providing for fiscal planning and financial management, can be strengthened based on a new balanced relationship with the Crown and ensuring accountability to MLCN citizens based on their input.

Dispute Resolution

When enacting laws, Muskeg Lake wants to ensure that citizens are heard and their concerns are addressed. By prioritizing dispute resolution and drafting legislation that ensures all citizens of Muskeg Lake are heard and represented, any legislation coming forward gives citizens the opportunity to have their concerns addressed.

Self-Government Discussion Tables

Our discussion tables with Canada and Saskatchewan offer our team the opportunity to share Muskeg Lake's vision for self-government directly with the federal and provincial governments. These tables are important points of contact with Canada and Saskatchewan's negotiating teams, allowing us to discuss how our community's challenges and priorities can be addressed through Inherent and Treaty-based self-government.

Since our last update, we've made several positive strides in our discussions. Below are the outcomes from the most recent meetings with the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination (RIRSD) Table and the Co-ordination Table.

RIRSD Table

MLCN continues to attend monthly RIRSD Table meetings with Canada. Discussions during these meetings are focused on moving away from the Indian Act and transitioning to laws that are developed in consultation with, and approved by, Muskeg Lake citizens.

In July, we submitted our initial draft of our Self Government agreement to Canada.. This Agreement is a major milestone in our negotiations with Canada and will be subject to extensive consultation with our citizens. We look forward to providing more updates on the status of our Self-Government Agreement, and will notify community of upcoming opportunities to learn about and provide feedback on the Agreement.

Co-ordination Table

Muskeg Lake continues to make significant progress on exercising our right to return full control over child and family services to kotawān. This is being done at the Co-ordination Table which is made up of representatives from MLCN and the governments of Saskatchewan and Canada who meet on a regular basis. The co-ordination agreement ensures this transition is done in a respectful manner that prioritizes the health and wellbeing of Muskeg Lake's families

Supporting the work of our main table are our sub-tables, which meet regularly for in-depth discussions on various aspects of Inherent and Treaty-based self-government.

Sub-tables

Several sub-tables have been created to support this work, including:

- The Transition Sub-Table: discussions are underway on the components of our child and family services law that need to be in place in order to successfully transition these services. Recently, our team delivered a presentation on the role of the Public Guardianship to this sub-table.
- The Data Sub-Table: We have submitted a request for data on the number of children in care, as well as their status and the costs associated with their care. Once this information is provided, we will be able to move forward on file reviews to analyze and identify the services currently provided, any gaps in services, and the costs associated with these services.
- The Information and Technology Sub-Table: Discussions at this table are currently taking place on the principles of data ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP). These principles assert Muskeg Lake's ability to collect, own and use our data as we see fit. This sub-table is also discussing questions surrounding Privacy Laws and Privacy Officers, and electronic client records.
- The Funding Sub-Table: While information relevant to the funding sub-table has been provided to the parties, we are waiting for work in other priority sub-tables to be completed before moving forward on this one.
- The Capital Sub-table: The building design option has been completed and funds were approved to complete a feasibility study for the project. Information is currently being gathered which will support this feasibility study. We are currently discussing the use of an interim office to accommodate additional staff hires in the meantime.

To support this work, Muskeg Lake is in the process of meeting with officials to access additional resources.

KOTAWĀN Updates

Recently, our team has tabled our draft kotawān law with the provincial and federal governments for review and discussion. Once the review of our draft law is complete, Muskeg Lake will be ready to move forward on the final reading and passage of the law.

To support this work, we are currently drafting policies for prevention and developing a framework for the kotawān child protection policies. We anticipate that these policies will be ready for community discussion and input this fall.

A range of programs fall under the scope of kotawān in order to create an integrated system of support for our families. Our main prevention and intervention program under the Progressive Model Project with Saskatoon Tribal Council has been busy with a number of activities, including summer camps in the community such as Culture Camp, Art and Music Camp, Family Camp, and Literacy Camp. The program has also supported camps outside of the community such as Redberry, Big River, Bosco Wilderness Survival Camp, summer sports camps and Summer Games. The program has also enabled other essential community initiatives including swimming lessons, the One-on-One Parenting Programming, Equine Therapy, and intervention and support services as per case plans with families.

kotawān has been actively conducting off-reserve file reviews and connections to the families from Muskeg Lake to assist with cultural plans, family connections and planning visits in and out of the community to re-unite families. This is both in the province of Saskatchewan and out of province across Canada. We have been steadily connecting with the various Ministries to identify the families from Muskeg Lake to offer our support for family connections, cultural plans, court processes, et cetera.

We are also currently awaiting the results of our initial program evaluation of the Demonstration Prevention Project. Once complete, this evaluation will give us valuable information on gaps in services and ways of improving our kotawān programming and services.

Engaging Community Members

Community engagement is crucial to ensuring our path to self-government reflects the needs and best interests of our Nation. Below are some of the ways the MLCN team is working to involve our community in self-government discussions:

1. We are beginning to work with many committees to circulate information on our work in self-government. We are consulting with these committees on what citizens want out of self-governance.

2. On May 17, 2024, our team presented to the Elders Committee to share our Nation's vision for Muskeg Lake self-determination and to receive their input on our path to Inherent and Treaty-based self-government.

3. Our team is working with the Language Group on elements and guiding principles in Cree law and traditional governance.

4. We are committed to providing regular updates to the community. We are exploring new ways to communicate with the public that we have not engaged in yet, including through radio advertising on our local station.

HOW WE'RE ENGAGING MUSKEG LAKE'S STAFF

As we embark on the path to Inherent and Treaty-based self-government, it is important that all of our staff are included and engaged.

We have been meeting with our managers and staff at MLCN to provide updates on our negotiations and the self-government process more broadly. Here are some ways we are engaging our team:

1. Holding regular meetings with managers and staff at MLCN to provide updates and identify potential challenges that need to be addressed on the path to self-government.

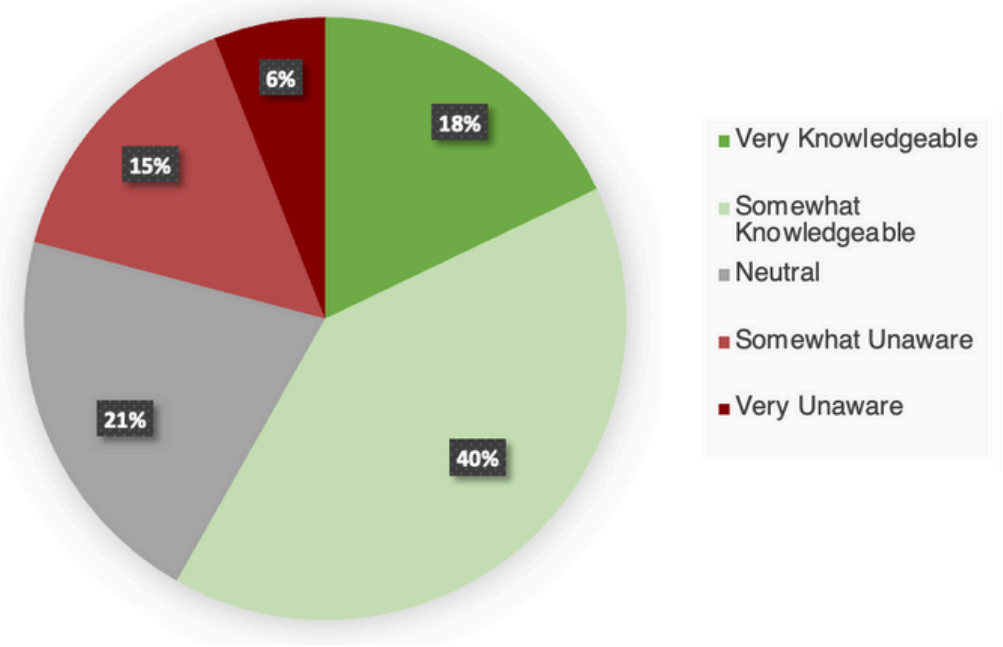
2. Holding monthly manager meetings that include regular updates and discussions on self-governance.

3. Working with our staff to find as many opportunities as possible to engage our community on self-governance.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

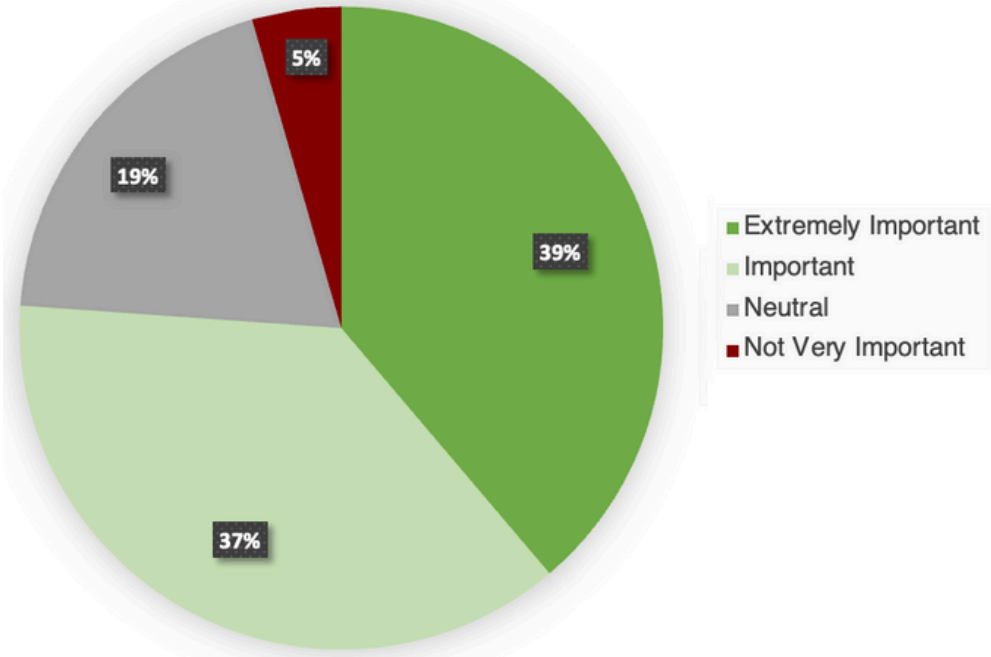
Since our last newsletter update, we've received several new responses to our citizen survey on Inherent and Treaty-based self-government. Outlined below are some of the key highlights from the most recent round of responses.

How would you rate your understanding of the concept of Muskeg Lake Inherent and Treaty-based self-government?



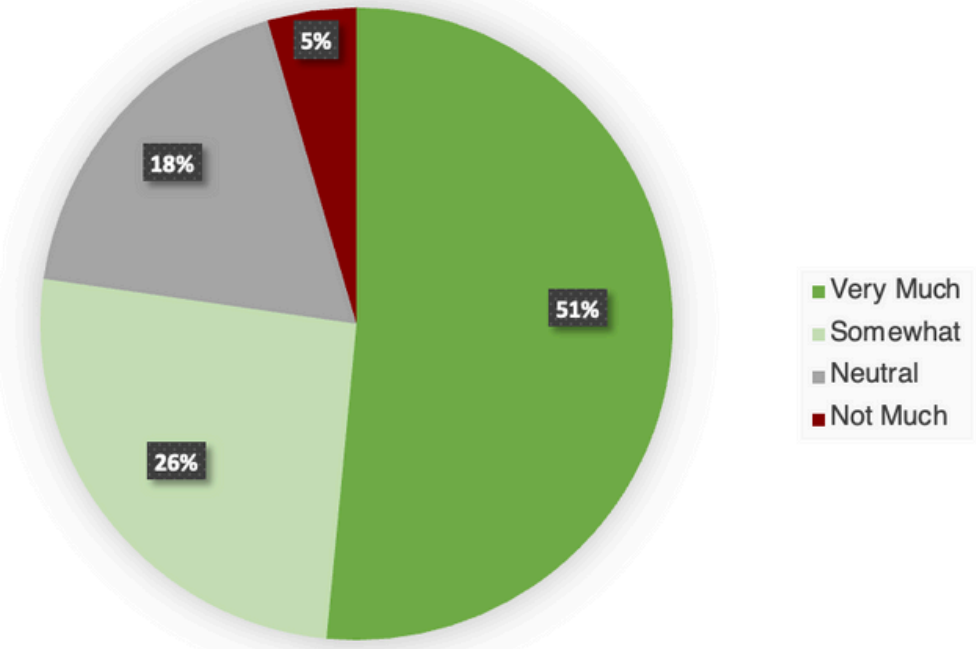
We continue to see that a majority of Muskeg Lake's citizens are knowledgeable about self-government, with a significant number of people considering themselves somewhat knowledgeable about the process.

To what extent do you believe that Muskeg Lake Inherent and Treaty-based self-government is important for the well-being of the community?



The survey responses are clear in indicating that an overwhelming majority of citizens see Inherent and Treaty-based self-government as either important or extremely important for Muskeg Lake. A small fraction of people do not view self-government as important.

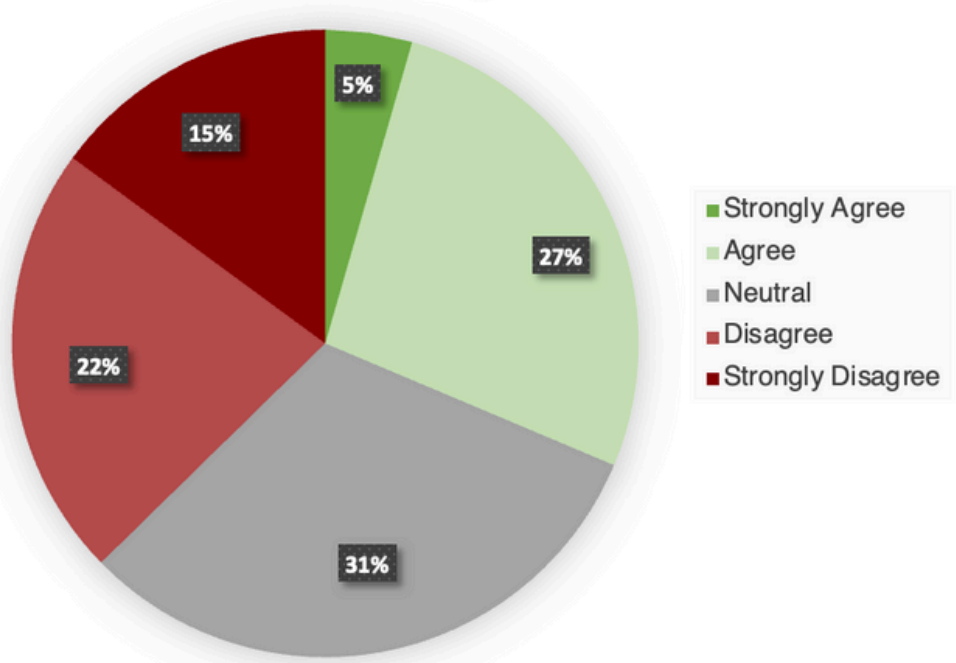
To what extent do you believe that Inherent and Treaty-based self-government contributes to the preservation of our cultures and traditions?



We also continue to see a clear trend of citizens who agree that Inherent and Treaty-based self-government contributes to the preservation of Muskeg Lake's cultures and traditions.

While views on Inherent and Treaty-based self-government are generally positive, we continue to see a split in citizens' feelings on their involvement in the self-government. While 32 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have been adequately involved in discussions and decision making, 37 per cent feel as though they have not been adequately involved.

Do you feel that you have been adequately involved in discussions and decision-making regarding Inherent and Treaty self-government?



Our community survey remains open for all Muskeg Lake citizens who would like to share their thoughts on Inherent and Treaty-based self-government. Click here or scan the QR code below to complete the survey.

We look forward to providing ongoing updates on our path to Inherent and Treaty-based self-government. In the meantime, you can contact us with any questions or comments you have on the self-government process.

HAVE QUESTIONS? LET US KNOW!

treatymanager@muskeglake.com

(306) 466-4959

muskeglake.com