

MP desires dialogue with institute

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The Ontario minister responsible for Northern development wants to improve communication with an independent research institute following a recent report showcasing the need for change in the region.

The Northern Policy Institute report on Northern Ontario recently released the report called a New Northern Lens. The report looked at ways to improve the region by comparing it to other northern areas. The report had 10 recommendations with one of them arguing that comparisons between Northern Ontario and its southern counterpart "are virtually meaningless because of the sparsity in population between these regions."

The report argues Northern Ontario has more in common with other northern jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere in the world like Iceland, Nor-

way and Sweden.

Northern Development and Mines Minister Michael Gravelle said the Liberal government is working closely with other northern jurisdictions and pointed to the northern development conference as an example, which include the federal levels as well.

Gravelle did highlight a few issues with the report such as it not reflecting the positive impact the region's agricultural economy has had, as an example, as well as the economic diversity in the research sector.

While he praised the independence of the research institute, he suggests that perhaps he needs to meet with them a bit more as the minister of northern development.

"There may be value for us to find a way to communicate in a more direct way," he said. "I would have appreciated speaking to the person doing the report because I could have commented on the report. Again, it

is much appreciated. It is all about finding a way to make Northern Ontario a more competitive and to have a stronger economy."

He pointed out that the purpose of the report was most likely to get the dialogue going.

Gravelle said he is working with the provincial minister in Quebec responsible for that province's northern plan and are sharing their thoughts on how to help each other.

"I'm grateful for the report and keen to say we are highly sensitive to that," Gravelle said.

"We put together a growth plan for Northern Ontario, which was the only second growth in the province of Ontario. The first one was in the greater Toronto Hamilton area. We have spent an extraordinary amount of time and energy working with Northerners to say what is the direction we need to go in to be really competitive and what are the priorities."