

Gwich'in deal sounds familiar to some chiefs
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INUVIK, N.W.T. – The Gwich'in people in the N.W.T. signed a deal with the territorial government Wednesday that ensures they get half the value of the government contracts in their region.

The territory's deputy premier announces the agreement to Gwich'in chiefs in Inuvik on Thursday.

But not all the chiefs at the meeting were impressed.

James Firth, the chief of Inuvik's Nihtat Gwich'in Council, says he is happy the territorial government has agreed to let the Gwich'in leadership be involved in the government's contracting, development and planning process.

"I guess the lesson is that when we do these things it should be in a language that everyone understands," he says. "Our interpretation of chapter 10 is that all work should belong to Gwich'in. And of course the government has their own interpretation."

Firth told deputy premier Jim Antoine that the agreement was too weak. He says he would like to sit down with the territorial government to make it stronger.

Antoine says he worked hard to convince other ministers to approve the memorandum, though he admits the memorandum is similar to Chapter 10 of the land claim.

"It could be construed as it is," he says. "But it's our way of trying to work that economic measures in that way."

Antoine says he hopes the agreement will become a model for other regions.

The memorandum goes into effect April 1 and remains in place for five years.