

President's Message

September 09, 2013

A major objective at the MMF is to promote Metis economic development. This is an essential part of who we are as a Government and as a Community. The Metis are an Aboriginal People born out of a culture of commerce. This culture initially included our traditional industries of fur, fisheries and forestry. Today our citizens continue to be involved in these and other resource developments such as mining and oil.

I have often said, in terms of revenue and job creation, hydroelectricity is our oil here in Manitoba. It is a source of natural wealth for our province. I support hydroelectricity as an opportunity for all Manitobans. But this wealth cannot be made on the backs of our Metis People. We will not be collateral damage to Manitoba Hydro's plans. This has happened many times in the past with projects like the Grand Rapids Dam, the Churchill River Diversion, and recently Wuskwatim and, we risk this happening again with the Bipole III transmission line.

The Metis have shouldered the burden of hydroelectric impacts and received little in the way of benefits or compensation. We were excluded from the Northern Flood Agreement and implementation agreements that led to First Nation partnerships. This was supposed to all change in 2001 with the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (AJIC) recommendation that "any future, major, natural resource developments not proceed, unless and until agreements or treaties are reached with the Aboriginal people and communities in the region, including the Manitoba Metis Federation..."

To any reasonable person the AJIC recommendation sounds pretty clear and straightforward: An MMF agreement comes first and only then does the project start. This was to respect our Aboriginal rights. This recommendation along with others was accepted by the Manitoba Government and became policy. Unfortunately for over a decade of development this policy has been conveniently forgotten. This policy must be followed on a number of current and planned projects including the Bipole III transmission line.

Not only has the Government, and its agent Manitoba Hydro, not reached any agreement on Bipole III, they have not meaningfully engaged the Metis nor done a credible and thorough environmental assessment of the project and its effects on the Metis Community. Back in March 2013 we said to the Clean Environment Commission (CEC) that it could not, in good conscience, recommend that Bipole III be approved for construction. Unfortunately this past August the Minister issued the license two months after receiving the CEC's final report.

With patience and hard work there are economic development opportunities and community benefits with the Bipole III and other future projects. But we must always ensure due diligence has been done. We must be confident that environmental protection measures are in place along with meaningful consultation and accommodation. To date, the Manitoba Government has not properly consulted the Metis. Neither has Manitoba, referred to as the Crown, nor Manitoba Hydro assessed the project's effects on Metis rights and accommodated the impacts.

The Bipole III is about 1,300 km in length and cuts a swath through the Manitoba Metis Community's traditional territory into the heart of our Metis Nation Homeland. Without any

doubt, the transmission line will impact Metis rights in the north, in the core of what is known as the Metis Bread Basket along the west side and, in the south, the old postage stamp province created in 1870 which was the focus of our recent MMF Land Claim victory at the Supreme Court of Canada.

In its decision the Supreme Court spoke of reconciliation and the honour of the Crown. Both of these have been sadly lacking when it comes to hydroelectric development and its impacts on the Manitoba Metis Community. The time has come for Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro to act honourably when they move forward on the Bipole III transmission line and future projects. The Metis will be treated as equal partners. The Metis People are saying loud and clear that enough is enough.

Meeqwetch.