

President's Message
May 5, 2014

May 12th is Manitoba Day. It is the day that the Manitoba Act received Royal Assent in 1870. It is the Act that created the province of Manitoba. A Prairie Research survey done back in 2009 determined that only four percent of Manitobans knew about the special meaning of this day. It is the birthday of the province that our Metis Ancestors created.

The Metis are the Founders of Manitoba and Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation. The Metis became one of our country's Founding Peoples when our Ancestors agreed to put down their arms and allowed a part of our traditional territory to become a part of Canada. As partners, moving forward must be to renew our partnership between the Metis and Manitobans, and other Canadians with meaningful reconciliation and mutual respect.

You will all recall that historic day on March 8th, 2013, after 32 years of legal battles by the Manitoba Metis Federation, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized the truth of our Metis history, the creation of Manitoba, and vindicated our people's 143-year-old struggle for justice for the Metis children who were promised but never received the 1.4 million acres of land as a head start over the expected influx of settlers from the east.

But the Metis were marginalized. And, in many ways, we still are today. The Court acknowledged this promise was frustrated by persistent inattention, negligence, repeated mistakes, delays, and inaction by Canada, and held that this solemn promise was not implemented in accordance with the honour of the Crown. The Crown fiduciary relationship and the honour of the Crown are still at stake today. Not only on the MMF Land Claim, but also between the Metis and Manitoba and its Crown Corporation Manitoba Hydro.

Despite Manitoba being the Founders of Manitoba, the Manitoba Government and Manitoba Hydro have developed and are planning to develop hydroelectric dams and transmission lines that have already or will have impacts on our Metis lands, waters, and other resources, and infringe our collective rights, interests and way of life. In the past this was done without our permission. Manitoba and Hydro still think they can get away with it today.

On the weekend, the MMF Board of Directors unanimously passed a resolution to set our course, possibly a collision course. The Board directed MMF to prepare, initiate and undertake as necessary, with all the legal, political, and other means at its disposal, to challenge the further development of future hydro projects including Keeyask, Conawapa, Bipole III and Manitoba-Minnesota transmission lines and other facilities, until the Metis are fully and properly consulted and accommodated.

The resolution also stated Manitoba and Hydro will need to have our prior, free and

informed consent for future development on our lands, waters, and other resources, and impacts on our collective rights, interests and way of life. This follows the 2008 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by Canada in 2010, that makes clear that governments need to obtain the prior, free and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources.

The Board did not forget past damages. It also directed the MMF to take action to resolve grievances including demanding full and proper compensation for the damages for past and existing projects including the Churchill River Diversion, Grand Rapids Dam and flooding of Summerberry Marsh, Winnipeg River System, and for exclusion from compensation processes including the Northern Flood Agreement.

It is both ironic and hypocritical that Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro could attempt to ignore Metis rights. Back in the 2001 the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission recommended, and the recommendation was accepted by Manitoba, that future, major, natural resource developments not proceed, unless and until agreements or treaties are reached with the Manitoba Metis Federation. We have never been asked to enter into any partnership on hydro development.

The MMF will be hosting the upcoming Town Hall Meetings Tour over the coming weeks to consult with Manitoba Metis Citizens across our province about the impacts of Hydro development. We will work together to determine our next steps, make a strategy, and protect the Metis Community from hydro impacts on our people and on our lands and waters. We demand that Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro respect our people. The Metis will no longer be the forgotten people.

Meeqwetch.