

President's Message

Our traditional economies are very important to our Metis families. These are for cultural and domestic as well as for commercial purposes. Commercial use includes forestry, trapping, berry harvesting, and, of course, fishing. From a financial perspective many of these industries have seen better days. Yet, for many, these remain a critical source of income. It is important and imperative that investments be made to ensure their future sustainability and success.

The Metis make up a majority of commercial fishers on lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Winnipegosis. The Metis have un-extinguished rights to harvest these lakes. The success of the provincial fisheries will be reflected with the success of our Metis fishers' livelihoods. Many Metis families are dependent upon the fishery as are the communities in which they purchase equipment and supplies, and from which they receive services.

Governments must remember that the Metis are Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation and the Founders of Manitoba. The Metis have been recognized as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples in s.35 of the 1982 Constitution, and acknowledged as an Indigenous people by the Supreme Court of Canada, the United Nations, Canada, and Manitoba. I have told the provincial government that the inclusion, cooperation, and support of Manitoba's largest group of indigenous people will be critical in the development of a comprehensive fisheries management plan.

One area of investment that must be part of a comprehensive plan and is often forgotten is fisher surveys and basic research. Information is the basic foundation of management decision-making. The Manitoba Government often reminds us, and others, that it is they who have the responsibility for the freshwater commercial fisheries management here in our province. Manitoba points to the 1930 Natural Resources Transfer Act as evidence of their authority.

Back in 2009 the past federal Minister of Fisheries echoed this when she wrote: "responsibility for freshwater commercial fisheries management in Manitoba rests with the Province." The Minister went on to write that the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) has "exclusive authority to regulate interprovincial and export trade in Manitoba with the agreement of the provincial government [...] while operating on a commercial, self-sustaining basis."

With a quick review of the FFMC's website you will find the statement: "Our wild-caught fish come from sustainable fisheries – the same lakes we have fished since we began our business in 1969." And then goes on to say "sustainable fisheries are typically categorized by three main points that distinguish them from other operations – insurance of long-term yield, preservation of intergenerational equity and maintenance of biological, social and economic systems."

There seems to be a disconnection here: the FFMC as our main exporter says the fishery is sustainable; FFMC while selling also has the responsibility to ensure uninterrupted supply and a continuing demand for the fish caught. Manitoba has the responsibility to manage the fishery to also protect this supply. Events this past week, including cries from those outside the province about fishery mismanagement, suggests the two have not worked together as they should for the benefit of our fishers.

The news suggests there is much work to be done. We, the MMF and myself, as both a Fisherman and President, believe that Manitoba's fisheries are underutilized and with investment will continue to be sustainable. We believe there is potential for not only sustainably increasing the production and income but also to find ways so the fishers gain long-term from ownership of production and with insurance and pensions. To do this both FFMC and the Manitoba Government must work with the MMF and the Manitoba Metis fishers who rely on the success of the fishery.

This past week, I wrote to Minister Neva Shonoff of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship (MCWS) regarding the MCWS recent November 9, 2015 news release and news conference. In reaction to a report from an American group the Province announced a comprehensive review of fisheries.

If you had seen the announcement, you would have noticed the MMF had been left out. We did not receive an invitation to participate in either drafting of the release or attending the conference. It was shameful to exclude the Metis. We would have anticipated the government ensuring the MMF is included in the core review committee and required consultations towards a sustainable fishery.

When I was a member of the Premier's Economic Development Advisory Council (PEAC), I often commented on the need for research funding for surveys of both fisheries and wildlife. I always made it clear that proper management requires data for decision-making. It is unfortunate the Manitoba government waited a decade to make the necessary promise of action but we applaud the first steps toward making a sustainable fishery.

The MMF is solutions oriented. We expect there to be full and enduring commitment from the Manitoba Government, with necessary financial and human resources, along with the participation of the MMF on behalf of the Manitoba Metis Community to make this happen. The Metis cannot be ignored. Only together can government take the important next steps for a sustainable fishery for the benefit of our fishers on these three lakes and those throughout Manitoba.

Upon closing, I offer my prayers for our friends who have passed on and my condolences to all those who have lost a loved one. My hopes are with those who are sick or shut in. I offer my best wishes to all.

Meeqwetch,