

President's Message

July 28, 2016

The Manitoba Metis Federation – the self-governing body representing Manitoba's Métis community – is in the midst of community consultations regarding the MMF Land Claims case.

I have been enjoying the conversations I have had with many of our Métis Citizens across the province of Manitoba. Already we have visited Churchill, Duck Bay, Dauphin, Kinosota, Roblin, and St. Laurent where we met with Métis Citizens from the locals in the surrounding areas. We have another 15 community consultations scheduled during the summer.

This is an important time for our Métis Citizens to learn about the next steps in the negotiation process for our collective claim against Canada. It is also an excellent time for you, our Citizens, to share your ideas with us on what are the priority topics for these negotiations with Canada to proceed and to share what is important to you as a Métis Citizen.

In the meetings that have taken place so far we have heard time and again how our citizens want to ensure our Children, Grandchildren and those of future generations truly receive the head start promised over 140 years ago. The loudest calls have been for education for our Children. As I have often said before, no longer will our families wonder if their children will be able to afford an education. No, our families will now instead be thinking about which university or college they will send their children to!

Other valuable ideas put forward have been around the issues of access to healthcare and affordability of medicines. A recent study the MMF did with the University of Manitoba has shown that the Métis have some of the worst outcomes in areas of diabetes, amputations, and other life threatening diseases. This study has shown that these outcomes are largely due to the fact that we do not have equal and culturally appropriate access to healthcare despite paying billions in taxes. We must explore all options to ensure our Elders and those in need of care have access to those medicines and services they need.

Our Métis Citizens also expressed their desire for strong economic development opportunities for our towns and villages. I remember when Duck Bay was prospering and we had five stores. Today we do not have any stores at all. Provincial governments have mismanaged our resources for years. Today our fisherman are largely out of business even though the fishery was once a mainstay for many a Métis village. This has to change. As we negotiate self-government, we will be sure to negotiate means to better protect, manage and conserve our natural resources.

When I first resurrected this land claim file back in 1997 when I became President, I made a promise I would see this through to the benefit of all Métis. The first thing I did was make this claim truly a claim of the people. I could have put my name on it as others had done before, but I didn't. I put the Métis people on the claim.

During my recent meetings with our Métis Citizens, I have encountered a few people with a misconception regarding the MMF Land Claim.

A misunderstanding about this claim surrounds the fact that it is a collective claim on behalf of all the Métis of Manitoba. This is not an individual claim seeking compensation on a family by family, lot by lot basis. The Supreme Court of Canada has said that these claims cannot be brought before the court and that it is not prepared to accept them – too much time has passed. However, the highest court in Canada did say they recognize the collective claim of the Métis of Manitoba. It also recognized the fact that the Manitoba Metis Federation is the governing body of Manitoba's Métis Community and the representative for Métis interests.

In 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada made a declaration that the honour of the Crown was breached and that the fact this claim has not been yet settled is an ongoing rift in the national fabric of Canada.

Recently, Mr. Tom Isaac also confirmed this in his report "A Matter of National and Constitutional Import: Report of the Minister's Special Representative on Reconciliation with Métis: Section 35 Métis Rights and the Manitoba Metis Federation Decision."

In his report Mr. Isaac emphasizes the MMF Land Claim has been accepted by the Supreme Court of Canada's 2013 declaration. His recommendation is for the MMF and Canada to move on implementing the declaration. On that matter I am pleased to say we have already moved beyond this recommendation in working with Canada to begin the process of settling this important matter. For full details on his report, I encourage you to visit our website at www.mmf.mb.ca and click the graphic for the Thomas Isaac report.

We are now involved in the next steps to developing a framework for a modern day treaty with Canada, which will deal with the MMF Land Claim. We signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Canada on May 27, 2016 and we will now develop a negotiations framework. We are now meeting with you, our Métis Citizens, to hear about what you want to see in this framework. We will then put together a draft framework agreement based on your input and put it forward for ratification at our upcoming AGA in Winnipeg on September 23-25, 2016 at the Assiniboia Downs. Once ratified, Canada will take it forward for Cabinet approval and we will begin the formal negotiation of this outstanding 146 year old claim against the Crown.

These are great times for the Métis. After almost a century and a half, we are beginning to see the sun rise on a better day for the Métis Nation. I invite, encourage and ask each Métis Citizen to attend a community consultation meeting happening in their region during the summer months. If you are unable to attend, please visit our website for information on the land claim process. Please also submit your ideas on what you want to see in the framework agreement to ideas@mmf.mb.ca.

Finally, I wish to give my thoughts and prayers for those who are shut-in, ill or have cause for grief. May you find comfort and strength in community with family and friends. I wish you all the best and safe journeys this summer as you get out and enjoy times together at home and away.

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