

President's Message – April 18

For the Metis people, our priority has always been the wise, balanced, and sustainable use of our natural resources. Our future depends on it. The Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) continues to take the necessary steps to ensure our traditional economies, environmental protections, and our Metis rights protections are integrated into decision-making.

Many Metis are business owners and employees who work hard in the bush and on the lakes. These workers, their families, and their local communities rely on the wood, berries, fish, and fur for their money income, and meat for their kitchen tables. Our Metis rights help to safeguard the ways we traditionally feed our families and support our local communities.

With our wins in the courts, and our increasing strength, we can no longer be ignored when industry and government want to build roads, dams, channels and floodways, and transmission lines that will impact our rights and our traditional lands. Before construction can start, there must be meaningful consultation of the Metis Nation's Manitoba Metis Community. And there must be agreements including accommodation such as compensation.

We have protected our Metis rights in many legal battles and political struggles. We have fought to get our rights recognized by other governments and industry. The MMF leads consultations of our people when our lands and our rights may be affected. We have never and we will never give up our rights. We take this responsibility seriously. We will never surrender our rights.

Our traditional economies of berry picking, fishing, forestry and others are important to the health and future of the Metis Community. There must be negotiations, when, for instance, when transmission lines are built, such as Bipole III and Manitoba Minnesota Transmission Project (MMTP) and Aboriginal rights impacted.

The Courts have taught us that consultation and agreements with Indigenous peoples is the way to address the impacts. The Manitoba NDP government was beginning to learn this lesson before the last provincial election. Following the 2014 Turning The Page Agreement, the MMF and Manitoba Hydro negotiated and reached our 2017 agreement.

Ignoring the Courts – and trampling over the Honour of the Crown – Premier Pallister now ignores our Metis government. Pallister called the MMF a special interest group. But he didn't stop there. Pallister engineered a Manitoba Government Cabinet directive to Manitoba Hydro that should concern all Indigenous peoples. In his directive he tells Manitoba Hydro they can no longer negotiate agreements with Indigenous peoples.

Interestingly, Manitoba Hydro can still negotiate agreements with farmers and private landowners. This looks very much like a race based directive. This is dog-whistle politics meant to be heard by his core supporters. But others see what is happening and we have received support from all over the province from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and leaders.

Our Manitoba Hydro – MMF agreement for \$67.5 million is not just about MMTP. It also includes the entire Bipole III line that impacts our people. These projects will have great losses over hundreds of hectares now used by our people for berry picking and hunting.

Premier Pallister, at first, suggested Metis have no rights. Then he says the MMF was giving away the rights of future generations. We are not giving anything away. Then hypocritically he implies he is concerned about future generations of Metis children. He is either trying to confuse people or he himself is confused. Maybe he thinks that our people are not educated. Maybe he has just been caught spinning a web of untruths.

He suggests that maybe "next time" there will be a future agreement with the Metis. I say we have waited too damn long. There will be no next time. There will likely not be a big transmission line built for a lifetime. And the Bipole III and MMTP will operate and impact our rights and our traditional lands for generations. We must deal with this now. We will not let anyone take advantage of our people ever again.

Full and proper consultation and accommodation must always be top of mind and a priority when any development is being done. For instance, we have serious concerns about the Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin Outlet Channel projects. The Manitoba Government website says this project is intended to reduce flooding and improve regulation of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. Are these the only affects of the project? We don't know - Consultation has not been done with the Metis and many others.

Changing water conditions can have impacts on commercial fishermen and trappers, and recreational users. Changing the water flows and levels can impact fish spawning, movement and populations. In some cases there can be future problems with invasive species, water quality, and algae blooms. There can be other issues concerning cottage properties, shorelines, docks, and boating. We must remember that this action is to create a PERMANENT channel. It is not temporary.

How are these being addressed? What is the full extent of concerns? What are the protections? We don't know the full extent of the issues and how to prevent further damage because full and proper consultation has not been done. It is important that we take all steps to protect the rights and interests of residents on Lake Manitoba, Lake Francis, and Lake Winnipeg and all those who may be impacted.

The Premier is trying to push this through. He is railroading the project. This is a good example of the Premier taking action without proper consultation and consideration for present and future generations. He is trying to scare people with his tactics. I assure Manitobans I will make the Premier take pause to do things right. Yes we are concerned about flooding, and we care about damages, but we need to develop the channels with processes that include proper studies and consultation, and agreements with all the affected Indigenous peoples.

In the past there has been much damage to First Nation and Metis Nation Citizens and others in the Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba regions and beyond. Now we must do this right for the benefit of all Manitobans. It is important that we find ways to solve problems. And it is important that we do this with good government and full consultation. The MMF will ensure this Premier hears the voice of the Metis Nation and wake up to our rights.

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