

## BRIEFING NOTE

**SUBJECT:** MMF's Perspectives on Water and Water Related Issues

**DATE:** March 10, 2023

**BY:** Energy, Infrastructure and Resource Management

### **BACKGROUND:**

The MMF's Energy, Infrastructure and Resource Management Department ("EIRM") prepared several perspectives on water and water related issues under the following six MMF ministerial portfolios: Natural Resources, Traditional Economies, Energy and Infrastructure, Agriculture, Mining, and Environment and Climate Change.

### **Water for Health: Accessing to WASH, Including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation**

- Fortunately, the majority of Red River Métis Citizens have reliable access to safe drinking water. However, Red River Métis Citizens living in remote regions still experience long-term boil water advisories. There continues to be an urban-rural disparity for access to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- In some Red River Métis Villages and Settlements, water quality continues to be impacted by orphaned and abandoned mines. Government ministries and departments must prioritize the proper remediation of these orphaned and abandoned mines, including the affected lands and waters in the surrounding areas. The MMF and RRM Citizens need to be engaged and consulted in remediation efforts and on-going monitoring activities. Remediation standards need to be improved and updated to better protect Citizens who use the lands and waters in the areas surrounding orphaned and abandoned mines.

### **Water for Sustainable Development: Valuing Water, Water-Energy Food Nexus and Sustainable Economic and Urban Development**

- The MMF's Minister of Agriculture has been mandated to develop a program to procure and utilize agricultural lands and physical supports, including feed and water, to help Red River Métis producers grow capacity and succeed despite extreme droughts and floods due to climate change as well as ensure that the interests of Red River Métis farmers and ranchers are included in the MMF's food security initiative plan.
- Agriculture and Agri-food are a priority of the MMF. It is imperative that the quantity and quality of water is available for Red River Métis Producers as well as the MMF's Food Security Initiative while also maintaining sustainable water management practices for safe and healthy consumption of produced components.
- The Minister of Energy and Infrastructure has been mandated with expanding Red River Métis monitoring of projects, developing representative procurement agreements with federal and provincial governments and ensuring the rights, claims and interests of our Nation are defended through regulatory processes. Energy infrastructure in the Red River Métis Homeland is primarily based on provincially owned hydro-electric dams. Over the past century these dams have seriously altered the landscape, impacted traditional economies including fishing, trapping and deteriorated lands where we practice constitutionally protected harvesting rights. Red River Métis deserve a bigger say in

energy projects that impact our Homeland and we need to share in the wealth that is being generated at our Citizen's expense.

- Across the National Homeland of the Red River Métis, commercial agriculture has been reliant upon developing drainage infrastructure for over a century, which has complicated the hydrology of flooding, impacted water quality through the loss of wetlands, decreased the quantity and quality of fish spawning areas, and fast-tracked agricultural pollutants into groundwater and our lakes and rivers that has caused frequent toxic cyanobacterial blooms. Wetlands, groundwater, rivers and lakes need to have a valuation that is more like a living legal entity, and regulations are needed to protect them as such. With federal oversight and Indigenous guided regulatory processes, some of the damage can be reversed by promoting wetland restoration and by implementing environmentally conscious fertilizer practices.
- Urban black water releases and treatment plants need to be addressed and properly funded to ensure that our big lakes can recover and regenerate. Hydroelectric operators in our Homeland need to reevaluate how they can further promote fish abundance through habitat restoration, fish ladders, fry stocking and through other means.

### **Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and DDR**

- The MMF's Minister of Traditional Economies has been mandated to engage and support Red River Métis Commercial Fishers, conduct habitat restoration practices, and spawning studies in various high-risk areas within the Homeland.
- In January 2021, the MMF launched the MMF Commercial Fisher Net Program. This program supported over 150 Red River Métis Fishers and provided approximately 2000 nets to Citizens that fish commercially.
- Biodiversity conservation is also a priority of the MMF. To monitor traditionally harvested species, the MMF initiated a Spawning Ground Study that involves catching and tagging Walleye within priority Red River Métis waterways. This study provides the MMF with valuable data on where mature Walleye are moving and spawning.
- The MMF's Minister of Environment and Climate Change has been mandated to develop a climate adaptation and resiliency plan, as well working with the department of Natural Resources to develop an Emergency Preparedness strategy. This includes assessing the impacts of climate change on the lands and waters within the Homeland, such as water levels, water quality, and its impacts on the Red River Métis.
- Water quality is a priority of the MMF. The MMF's Community Based Monitoring Program equips Red River Métis citizen scientists with the tools and skills required to collect water samples throughout the open water season. These samples are then analyzed for different chemical parameters (e.g., pH, dissolved oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, etc.) and physical parameters (e.g., clarity, temperature, water level and flow, etc.) on site. This program braids western science with Métis Traditional Knowledge to collect and monitor the lands and waters across the National Homeland, and the impacts from Climate Change on RRM rights, interests and claims.
- Metis Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow (MELT) Program discusses the impacts of human activities and climate change on the waterways of the Homeland with school-aged Red River Métis youth and allows youth to experience these waterways through outdoor activities, such as canoeing, swimming, and fishing. This gives youth an appreciation for

the waterways and allows them to see the impacts of these activities firsthand. MELT does age-appropriate water monitoring and testing using the Riverwatch Kit. The Riverwatch kit is also used in other MMF water monitoring initiatives, as it provides fast test results which do not require lab processing.

- Red River Métis Stewards of the Homeland Program (SOHP) addresses climate change through the conservation, protection, and restoration of the environment to build resiliency and increase biodiversity. This work is conducted through land-based education and training involving Red River Métis Youth, Harvesters, and Elders.

### **Water Cooperation Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Water Across the 2030 Agenda**

- Historically, Indigenous Nations have been excluded from international and transboundary water cooperation discussions despite decisions made around water quality and water levels directly impacting Red River Métis harvesting rights. The inclusion of Indigenous partners within transboundary and international discussions is crucial as they are the traditional owners and stewards of the land.
- Métis representation on the various watershed boards (IJC, IRRWB, MB Watershed Districts, etc.) is a necessity to ensure RRM rights, interests and claims are being considered, and to enforce a distinction-based approach with water quality and quantity issues for Indigenous communities.

### **Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade. Including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan**

- International and Federal Governments should work closely with stakeholders, specifically Indigenous governments, to successfully achieve and implement objectives before 2028.
- Programs and projects implemented need to utilize a distinctions-based approach when dealing with Indigenous stakeholders, and recognize Indigenous Knowledge (IK) when designing science-based management plans.