



Métis
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Update on Métis Harvesting Issues

TO: MNA Members

FROM: Audrey Poitras, President, Métis Nation of Alberta

DATE: February 12, 2008

Now that February has arrived, and some of our harvesters have made their first appearances in the courts, I would like to offer an update on the implementation of our Action Plan on Métis Harvesting.

The MNA has stood up for Métis rights by implementing our own Métis-made Harvesting Policy in August 2007 and challenging Ted Morton's policy that attempts to decide who is Métis and who has rights in this province. This fall our harvesters organized traditional hunts throughout the province. These hunts were an overwhelming success and included hundreds of citizens participating throughout the province. The next edition of *Otipemisiwak* will provide photos and details on these hunts to MNA members so make sure you get your copy of the magazine.

As a result of these hunts, close to a dozen charges have been laid against Métis men, women, entire families and Elders from northern, central and southern Alberta. We now have over 15 charges throughout the province. The MNA is actively defending all of these harvesters as well as other harvesters who have been charged.

In order to defend our harvesters, we have retained Métis lawyers, Jason Madden and Jean Teillet, to represent our harvesters in the courts. As many of you know, Jason and Jean have acted as legal counsel in various capacities in well-known Métis rights cases across the Homeland, including, *Powley* (Ontario), *Lavolette* (Saskatchewan), *Belhumeur* (Saskatchewan) and *Goodon* (Manitoba). I want to thank Jason and Jean for their commitment to advancing our rights agenda in Alberta and also for their presentation at our Annual Assembly in August.

More importantly, I want to thank our Métis harvesters and Métis citizens who came out to support our hunts this fall. Without you, there would be no MNA or Action Plan. I also want to acknowledge our Captains of the Hunt for their efforts; your commitment to protecting and preserving our rights for future generations is admirable.

At the recent February appearance dates for the existing charges, these matters have been adjourned in order to prepare for trial. Unfortunately, due to the research required for these cases and the realities that these cases take time to prepare, it is likely we will not

have any trials begin until the Fall of 2008. However, as developments and more information becomes available on the state of the cases, I will provide the information to MNA members.

In addition to the organized hunts, the MNA's leadership continues to push forward at the political level on our Action Plan. We continue to meet with Ministers and MLAs to garner support for the Points of Agreement for a Final Métis Harvesting Agreement that were reached with Minister Boutilier in June 2007, but were rejected by Ted Morton. We also tabled a petition with over 2,400 signatures in the Alberta Legislature rejecting Ted Morton's policy and demanding a new province-wide Métis harvesting agreement. We have increased public awareness on this issue through many media stories and opinion pieces being published in newspapers across the province. Equally important, MNA members have taken the time to write to their MLA, Ministers and the Premier about their disappointment with what Ted Morton has done. Based on all of this work, the message is clear: Métis rights must be recognized and respected by the Alberta Government.

Unfortunately, the strong pursuit of our rights agenda has strained our relationship with the Alberta Government in some areas. We have been told by some in government to 'just accept Morton's policy', be happy with what has been 'given' to us, and, 'get back to the table'. These positions are truly unfortunate. What has been even more unfortunate is that some Métis leaders, who have been elected to represent the rights and interests of the Métis people in this province, have decided to work against our united approach. Instead of supporting our Action Plan, they have told the Alberta Government that the MNA does not have the support of its members and that they "would get back to the table," even though their own people face charges across the province.

As MNA President, I reject the idea that we have to just 'accept' whatever individuals like Ted Morton think we should have. Our rights were not and are not 'given' to us by any government. We have our rights because our ancestors fought for and protected our rights. All we need from government is for them to recognize and respect our rights. Nothing more. Nothing less.

The MNA was created to protect and advance Métis rights. In the past, our leaders have never abandoned our rights agenda, even when governments have used their power against us and resources to pressure us. I remain 100 per cent committed to ensuring Métis rights are recognized and respected by the Alberta Government. I am optimistic that all Métis leaders will soon begin to support the interests of the Métis people on this issue, not those of the Alberta Government or their self-interests.

Based on the immense support the MNA has received from harvesters and individual members to date, I know that our citizens are behind the MNA as it pushes forward on the Métis rights agenda. I also know our ancestors would be very proud that we are ensuring our rights will continue to be protected for generations to come.