“The MNO cannot do this alone, we must work together to achieve results.”

- MNO President Gary Lipinski

Working Together
President’s Update on Métis Rights

As always, the protection and advancement of Métis rights and self-government are front and centre in the Métis Nation of Ontario’s (“MNO”) agenda. As MNO President, I continue to make this a priority in everything the MNO undertakes. As such, I am pleased to provide an update on some recent initiatives, developments and upcoming events.

Métis Inclusion in Ontario’s Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Strategy

Based on our interventions and positive relationship with the Ontario Government, we now have confirmation that the MNO will be included within Ontario’s recently announced Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Strategy. This is a very positive development and will provide us the opportunity to tell the Ontario Métis story, as a part of the history of treaty-making in this province as well as the contemporary recognition of Métis rights.

In this fiscal year, we have received funding to consult with our citizens and communities on what initiatives we would like to see undertaken as part of the Strategy. I encourage all citizens to read my previous memo dated February 6, 2015 that provides further details on this initiative. The memo is available on the MNO’s website at www.metisnation.org.

As well, please provide your comments and suggestions on the MNO’s involvement in the Strategy to Joanne Meyer, MNO Director of Intergovernmental Affairs by March 31, 2015 on what types of initiatives you believe this Strategy should support. Joanne can be reached via email at joannem@metisnation.org or at the MNO office in Toronto.

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Ongoing Engagement with Ontario on Métis Communities

The MNO continues to work with the Ontario Government on Métis rights issues flowing from our original commitment in the Harvesting Agreement reached in 2004. This important work will inform our future negotiations with respect to the removal of the current 1250 cap on Harvester Cards, Crown consultation and other rights-related issues.

Notably, in December 2014, the historic research project on the Mattawa-Nipissing region, which was overseen by a tripartite steering committee consisting of the MNO, and the Ontario and federal government, was completed. This report is now available on the MNO’s website under the Registry/Historic Research section.

In addition, we continue to move towards finalizing joint assessments of the existing historic research on Ontario Métis communities. We hope to have these completed in the next few months and will be reporting out to our citizens at the upcoming MNO Annual General Assembly. I encourage all of our citizens to attend this important Assembly, which will be held in Midland in August, for updates on this rights-related work.

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Recent Quebec Court Case
No Rights-Bearing Métis Community Established

For information purposes, I had the MNO’s legal counsel prepare a case summary on a recent decision from the Quebec Superior Court in R. v. Corneau. A copy of this summary is available on the MNO’s website at: www.metisnation.org.

In this case, 16 individuals claimed “Métis” harvesting rights in eastern Quebec. The trial judge found that there was no evidence of a historic Métis community in this region. The court also rejected the defendants’ arguments that simply having an Aboriginal ancestor in Quebec in the 1700s and now creating an organization today that asserts does not meet the test for Métis rights established in the Powley case. This case, along with others from east of Ontario, demonstrates the importance of the collaborative work we are doing with the Ontario Government on the identification of Métis communities—based on the facts of history—not just political rhetoric. It also emphasizes the importance of the MNO maintaining a credible Harvesting Card system that is based on the Powley test.

The Daniels Case
“No More Political Football”

As we are all too well aware, since Canada was created the Métis have been treated as the proverbial “political football” with respect to what level of government (federal or provincial) has constitutional responsibility and jurisdiction for us.

The Daniels case, started by well-known Métis leader Harry Daniels, is about whether the federal government has constitutional responsibility for the Métis, similar to the responsibility it has for First Nation and Inuit peoples.

At trial and on appeal (where the MNO was an intervenor at the Federal Court of Appeal), the courts have affirmed that we have always known the federal government has constitutional responsibility for Métis in the same way it does for all Aboriginal peoples.

The federal government has now appealed our victories at the lower court levels to the Supreme Court of Canada. A tentative hearing date for the Daniels appeal has now been set for October 8, 2015.

Based on the unanimous direction of the 2014 MNO AGA, the MNO will be intervening in the Daniels case at the Supreme Court of Canada. We will continue to keep people updated on developments with respect to this important case for Ontario Métis and the Métis Nation.

Federal Policy Consultations
“Finally Dealing with Métis Claims”

Over the last several months, the federal government has been undertaking consultation on its Comprehensive and Specific claims policies that are designed to address outstanding Crown obligations as well as outstanding land and rights claims of Aboriginal peoples. Many large, Métis communities have been excluded from these federal policies. This is unacceptable to Ontario Métis. Moreover, this federal exclusion can no longer be sustained based on the Supreme Court of Canada’s decisions over the last decade.

From the Powley case to the Manitoba Métis Federation case to the Daniels case, the message from the courts to the government has been clear: reconciliation in Canada cannot continue to exclude the Métis people. Negotiation processes to address Métis rights, interests and claims are the only way forward.

Accordingly, the MNO has been actively involved in both federal consultation processes. I met with Doug Eyford, the Federal Government’s Special Representative on the Comprehensive Claims process, in November 2014. I expect to meet with Renée Pelletier, the Federal Government’s Special Representative on the Specific Claims process, in the near future.

I am optimistic that both Special Representatives will recognize the need for the existing policies to be modified to include Métis or that a distinct Métis claims process be established. We are expecting that Mr. Eyford’s report will be very soon and will keep citizens updated on progress.

Very likely, changes to these policies will not occur immediately, however, the writing is on the wall that at some point in time, Métis rights, interests and claims will finally need to be addressed by the federal government.

Upcoming Federal Election
“Make Your Vote Count”

Related to some of the issues outlined above, it is very likely a federal election will be held in the Fall of 2015. In preparation for this, I have recently written to the federal Conservative, Liberal and NDP parties for meetings.

At these meetings, I will be asking these three parties where they stand on issues of importance to Ontario Métis such as Métis inclusion of the federal Comprehensive and Specific claims processes; the renewal of the Aboriginal Skills, Education and Training program; and their ongoing commitments to Métis Registry funding and other priorities.

Flowing from these meetings, we will be providing information on the policies of all three parties with respect to Métis, so our citizens can make an informed choice when they cast their ballots. While our 10,000 Métis are dispersed throughout Ontario, we can make a difference in many key ridings in this province.

We must flex our voting power—as Ontario Métis—in this upcoming federal election. That is the only way we will finally begin to see progress at the federal level on our issues. The MNO cannot do this alone, we must work together—to achieve results.

As you can see, we have much going on in order to advance Métis rights in Ontario. These are just a few of the initiatives that I wanted to provide updates on, but there is much more that the MNO does every day related to our rights agenda.

Also, whenever I travel to our communities, I stress that all of the work that is being done on the local and regional levels—as a part of consultations, traditional knowledge studies or public awareness initiatives on Métis—contributes to our efforts.

I want to thank all of our citizens for their continued support and confidence as we move the Métis Nation’s rights-based agenda forward.