



MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO - FACT SHEET

Implementation of the National Definition of Métis within Ontario and the MNO Registry Policy

Adoption of a Definition of Métis by the MNC General Assembly (2002)

- After years of extensive consultations, discussions and debates, the Governing Members of the Métis National Council (“MNC”), including the Métis Nation of Ontario (“MNO”), unanimously adopted the National Definition for Citizenship within the Métis Nation at the MNC General Assembly (“AGA”) in September 2002:

“Métis” means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation.

“Historic Métis Nation” means the Aboriginal people, then known as Métis or Half-breeds, who resided in the Historic Métis Nation homeland.

“Historic Métis Nation Homeland” means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-breeds as they were then known.

“Métis Nation” the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation, which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the “aboriginal peoples of Canada” within the meaning of Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

“Distinct from other Aboriginal peoples” means distinct for cultural and nationhood purposes.

- The MNO agreed to the definition’s geographic descriptor of “the area of land in west central North America” because it without question included the Métis communities within Ontario represented by the MNO.
- No Métis Nation Homeland map accompanied the adoption of the definition in 2002, however, previous MNC maps included areas well outside the northwestern of Ontario.
- In 2002, no statements were made at the time—by anyone—that the geography in this definition only included northwestern Ontario or that this definition would exclude the Métis community of Sault Ste. Marie whose rights were being considered by the Supreme Court of Canada during this time period. Clearly, if this kind of limitation had been attempted, the MNO would not have agreed to a definition that would have excluded the Métis community that it was before the highest court of the land defending or other Métis communities the MNO has represented since 1993.
- Moreover, one of the key drivers for adopting a definition in 2002 was so at the hearing before the Supreme Court of Canada, the MNC could say: “we have a definition” and the court should not impose one in violation of the Métis Nation’s inherent right to self-determination as a people.

The Subsequent Ratification of the Definition by Métis Nation Citizens and Governments

- Because of the MNC’s non-governmental legal structure (i.e., it is a national advocacy body), the definition did not have any legal force or effect until it was ratified by each of the democratically elected Métis Governments that create the MNC.
- Over the next two years, through amendments to their constituting documents (e.g., bylaws, constitution), each Métis Government ratified and incorporated the definition.
- There are two key reason why the definition was adopted and ratified by the Métis Governments that form the MNC:
 - It respected that each Métis Government that forms the MNC needed to adopt it through its own procedures, legal structures, bylaws or constitution. Simply put, the process respected the jurisdiction of each Métis Government on this issue.
 - There had been extensive consultations on it for almost a decade beforehand. It was not jammed though at one MNC General Assembly meeting without any warning, discussion, debate or consultation.

Ratification and Implementation of the Definition by the MNO

- In 2004, the MNO amended article 4(a) of its bylaws to include a new definition of “Métis” consistent with the National Definition:

Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.
- To be eligible for MNO citizenship, the MNO Bylaws require that an applicant provide “sufficient documentation” to prove that they meet this definition (article 5(a)).
- Unlike Métis citizens in the Prairie provinces who often solely rely on Métis scrip records for identification, the MNO had to develop its own policy for identifying Métis Nation citizens in Ontario in order to operationalize this new definition based on the MNO’s longstanding and well-known Métis rights assertions within Ontario (i.e., the Sault Ste. Marie Métis community and other Métis communities outside of northwestern Ontario).
- **It would be absolutely absurd for anyone to think or argue that the MNO would interpret or implement the definition in a way that excluded the Sault Ste. Marie Métis community (i.e., the community that the Supreme Court of Canada recognized as holding Métis rights), Steve and Roddy Powley as MNO citizens or other Métis communities that the MNO had long represented.**
- Ultimately, the “MNO Registry Policy” was adopted on an interim basis in 2009. It provides guidance to the MNO Registrar on how to interpret and implement the definition. This policy underwent extensive province-wide engagements in 2011 and 2012, before being adopted as the formal policy in 2014 by the MNO Annual General Assembly.

- The Registry Policy requires applicants to provide proof of Historic Métis Nation ancestry by “providing evidence of a genealogical connection to a Métis Ancestor who lived in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland after 1750.” The policy also requires applicants to provide “documentary proof” linking them “through each generation to [that] Métis ancestor” (sections 18 and 20).
- Furthermore, the Registry Policy recognizes that as “a general theory” the Historic Métis Nation Homeland encompass “‘west central North America’ or the ‘North West’.” It also recognizes that the territory “was quite large” and “the limits were not clearly defined” as there were “no hard borders.”
- To operationalize the new definition, the MNO included a map depicting the Historic Métis Nation Homeland in Ontario at Appendix A of the Registry Policy. This map aligns closely with the MNO’s Traditional Harvesting Territories map that has been in the public domain since the early 2000s.

Ratification and Implementation of the Definition by the MNO (2004 Onward)

- Like all of the MNC’s Governing Members, the MNO has had to deal with legacy issues with respect to its registration of citizens prior to the new definition coming into effect. The MNO has been forthcoming and transparent on how it has dealt with this issue, which is detailed in its “What We Heard Report” from its province-wide consultations held in 2011 and 2012.
- Notably, to date, only the Métis Nation of Alberta has cancelled its old membership cards and now has 45,000 registered and verified citizens based on its approach to the definition. The Métis Nation-Saskatchewan has started the process a re-registering all Métis Nation citizens in that province. The Manitoba Métis Federation has not yet cancelled its old memberships.
- In 2018, the MNO initiated a Registry Review in order to prepare for self-government. This review included assessing all citizenship files, issuing new MNO cards to verified Métis rights-holders and preparing a final report for future consideration and action by the MNO. It is expected that this report will be finalized by the end of 2020. For additional information see MNO Fact Sheet on Registry Review.