

Tony Belcourt Statement on the MNC Expert Panel

April 13, 2025

My name is Tony Belcourt, founding President of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

At long last, the Métis National Council's independent Expert Panel Report has been released. It concludes that the Métis communities of Ontario are, in fact, part of the larger historic Métis Nation.

This is no surprise to me. I've known this for over 54 years—ever since the Métis organizations on the Prairies formed the Native Council of Canada in 1971 to advance Métis issues at the national level. They did so with the participation of the Northwest Ontario Métis Association. I know this because I was there.

And because of that long history, it is no surprise that the Métis leadership on the Prairies fully endorsed the Métis Nation of Ontario when it was founded 31 years ago in 1994. Later that year, at the Métis National Council General Assembly, the MNO was voted unanimously as a full and equal governing member of the MNC.

Regrettably, within the last number of years, some leaders—primarily from Manitoba and Saskatchewan—began to ask, “Are they part of us?”

In 2022, the Métis governments of the MNC, in an annual assembly, approved a resolution to appoint an independent panel of experts to investigate and report on that question. The Métis National Council's Expert Panel was given a simple mandate: Do the seven historic Métis communities of Ontario belong to the Métis Nation? Their investigation was to be conducted through the lens of the definition of Métis that was adopted by the Métis National Council in 2002. That definition came from years of debate and consideration by the MNC's Métis Rights Panel, which I chaired, and which included then-MNC President Clem Chartier and MMF President David Chartrand.

Naturally, I am extremely pleased by the Panel's conclusion. And I quote: “The Panel concludes that the seven communities represented by the Métis Nation of Ontario meet the National Definition established by the Métis National Council ... Thus, it is our expert opinion that these communities are integral to the Métis Nation and its Homeland.”

You would think that this would lift the heavy weight of denial over the legitimacy of the Métis communities in Ontario.

But I am deeply disturbed by what it took to get here—and by the swift and flippant denunciation of those conclusions by some Métis and First Nations leaders.

I'm in my 80s. I've seen and experienced discrimination and racism all my life. My mom and dad went through it. So did my grandparents. And our ancestors before them. It's come from outside our community, and sadly, it's come from within. It's demeaning. It's humiliating. And it's painful.

There is no way to calculate the amount of undue mental and physical harm our people have suffered over these past few years in Ontario. Our communities have been scrutinized. Our people told they are not recognized. Told that their very existence is a lie. Our children have seen Métis leaders call them frauds. They've even been told by a chief visiting their school that they've been lied to about who they are.

What kind of adult would do that?

But it hasn't always been this way. Before this latest campaign to erase Métis people and communities from Ontario, we worked closely with both the Métis of Manitoba and the Chiefs of Ontario.

David Chartrand and other Prairie leaders stood beside us at the Supreme Court of Canada in the landmark case of *R v. Powley*. They were there to celebrate our victory—and to benefit from that affirmation of our Métis rights.

We were also blessed with strong relationships with First Nations in Ontario. In 2005, we renewed our Nation-to-Nation relationship with the Anishinabek Nation, honoured in ceremony at Kettle and Stony Point First Nation.

Before that, we had signed a political protocol with the Chiefs of Ontario that helped us both advocate effectively with governments on issues of shared concern. We rejected attempts to divide and conquer. I remember when the Chiefs of Ontario refused the Ontario government's request to intervene on its behalf at the Ontario Court of Appeal to overturn the ruling affirming our constitutional right to hunt and fish for food.

It is my sincere hope that those who have denied the existence of our people and our communities in Ontario will do the honest thing and at least read the MNC's Expert Panel Report—its mandate, its evidence, and what it says about the seven historic Métis communities of Ontario.

That they will follow our teachings of honesty, truth, humility, and respect, and begin a dialogue with our people—whether that's at work, or in the community.

It's time for healing.

If you believe in truth and reconciliation, then let's put those recommendations into action.

There is far more to be gained in unity than in division.

We proved that before. Let's do it again.

Ekosi. Hiy hiy.

Tony Belcourt
April 13, 2025