

**ACTION PLAN FOR PRIORITIES OF THE  
METIS NATION OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

**A discussion paper for the 1992 Metis Nation  
Assembly with recommendations for action to  
implement the priorities established by the  
Metis Nation Assembly in 1991.**

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## BACKGROUND

The territorial and national Metis leadership have done a masterful job in securing recognition, rights and benefits for the Metis people of Canada. The Metis today have a secure place in the national and territorial constitutional and political agenda. In emphasising the common heritage and strength of Metis people generally, the territorial and national leadership has secured a status for Metis in Canada that has been denied you in the past. The challenge now for The Metis Nation in the Northwest Territories is to achieve the full potential that this status offers. To do that the Metis Nation can build on the strengths of its members in the communities and locals. The draft action plan that follows is intended to serve as a framework for action to produce long term growth of the Metis Nation in the Northwest Territories.

## MISSION STATEMENT

An action plan like this should start from a focused statement that clearly sets the purpose of the Metis Nation in the Northwest Territories. A draft mission statement is recommended to the assembly for discussion:

**THE METIS NATION IS DEDICATED TO THE GROWTH AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ALL METIS PERSONS WHO TOGETHER WILL PROTECT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND WORK TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE THEIR CULTURE, ECONOMY AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE METIS HOMELAND OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES.**

This statement is not intended to force all Metis in the Northwest Territories into the same mold. It should do just the opposite. It should reassure all Metis in the Northwest Territories that the Metis Nation will work to assist their growth and strength at the individual, family and Local level and thereby strengthen the Metis Nation as a whole. Just as cooperation by combining regional strengths at the national level achieved results far exceeding regional efforts of the past, so in the Northwest Territories can the Metis become stronger by working from the voluntary combined strength of the individual locals. Such cooperation will truly establish the Metis people as a nation and ensure that the purposes of the draft mission statement are accomplished.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE DRAFT ACTION PLAN

The 1991 Metis Nation Assembly set priorities that the Metis People of the Northwest Territories expected to be addressed by the Metis Nation Executive.

The 1991 short term priorities (12 months) in order of importance to the people participating in the priority setting workshop were:

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1. secure adequate funding so that the Métis Nation and its locals may accomplish their goals
  2. improve education for Métis students
  3. secure medical benefits for Métis
  4. promote economic development programs for Métis
  5. reduce alcohol and drug problems
  6. enhance Métis history and culture
  7. resolve land claims
  8. improve Métis entrepreneurial skills
  9. support youth
  10. Improve funding for Métis housing

In considering long term priorities (5 Years), the 1991 assembly set three priorities:

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1. secure adequate funding so that the Métis Nation and its locals may accomplish their goals
  2. improve Métis Education
  3. resolve Métis land claims
  4. promote economic development among the Métis
- \*\* amended as per RESOLUTION #4-11-07-93 (attached)

Some of these priorities can be addressed with funding (education and economic development) while others, like land claims, depend on the political environment. This draft action plan concentrates on those priorities that can be tackled by the Métis Nation for its members with appropriate funding. For example, the Métis Nation can develop a strategy for Métis education, secure funding and go on to implement the plan for the benefit of Métis students. On the other hand, establishing a Métis land base in the Métis Homeland is not that simple, it requires the ongoing participation of other independent parties whose priorities and agenda cannot be set by the Métis Nation alone.

The order of the items addressed in this plan will follow that established in the list of short term priorities set by the 1991 Métis Nation Assembly in Fort Simpson.

## EDUCATION

The goal of the Actions recommended for Métis education is for each Métis student to become qualified for the post secondary career oriented education and/or training of the student's choice.

Education for Métis was rated the highest in both short and long term priority categories at the 1991 Assembly. Statistics show that there is a very high dropout rate for aboriginal students in the NWT. There may be some remedies for that problem for Métis students.

It would be unrealistic to establish a separate primary and secondary school system for Métis students completion grade 12, but methods can be found that will see more Métis students completing grade 12. Statistics for the mid - 80's show that up to 40% of all Métis Students were either not entering, or were dropping out of high school. This can be reduced. A person without a high school education cannot expect to enter post

secondary education or training programs without significant upgrading. When enrolment quotas limit entry for many programs, persons requiring upgrading will not be considered.

A two pronged action plan for Metis education is recommended. One would be aimed at community support for education in kindergarten to grade 9; the other could provide counselling and tutorial support for Metis students in community grade 10, regional high schools, and Arctic College.

There are several issues that apply to both levels of education. More emphasis on Metis Heritage and Culture is needed when preparing the curriculum; and, there needs to be more effort placed on assessment and providing a more effective learning program for school children with special needs.

#### Kindergarten to Grade 9:

The effectiveness of an education system in the primary and junior levels is in a large part dependant on the learning environment established in the home and community. It is important that every Metis Local establishes a school support group that can work with the principal and teachers to provide a quality program that equips students for further education and training. Emphasis on education in the home, by community leaders and elders will help establish and maintain a healthy school environment. Agreeing together that the school is charged with providing a high quality program can send important signals to pupils on the need for diligence and effort on their part. With appropriate public support the school, family and community working together can provide a mutually supportive program; a program that prepares the student for further education, either in the home community or elsewhere.

All this sounds fine in theory, but how can we make it work? Is it possible for each Metis Local to work with the local school(s)? In addition to local support groups, it is recommended that the Metis Nation executive secure professional help for the Metis Locals, especially those in communities without high schools. This resource person would work with the Metis Local support groups as they develop a working relationship with their school's teaching staff.

The Metis Nation can also address concerns at the political level in cases where the legitimate concerns of its people are not being addressed by the Department of Education.

#### High School and Arctic College

Statistics show that most Metis in the labour force have completed grade 9 but almost half have not completed grade 12. Although these statistics were collected in 1985, the trend today seems similar. The action taken to improve this situation should

emphasise a program that serves the aspirations of all Metis high school students to achieve their full potential.

Grade 10 is a significant change in education from the junior program of grades 7 to 9. Usually it involves fewer subjects which are taught more often per week, especially in the semester system now followed in NWT high schools. It therefore requires much more diligence on the part of the student. Many are not prepared for this and may become discouraged. This is compounded for students who may be away from home for the first time and living in a boarding home or hostel.

A counselling and tutorial program, if approved by the Metis Nation assembly, will seek funding for a pilot program for 1992/93 during which the program would be developed and initiated at one high school for the spring semester before it is implemented for all high schools, community grade 10 and Arctic College in 1993/94. This program would have several features including:

- notice and description of services to Metis students prior to fall enrolment at school;
- registration in the program by Metis students wishing to receive help from counsellors and tutors;
- matching students with counsellors and tutors and establishing a schedule for study sessions;
- follow-up with school and family by counsellor/tutor.

This program will emphasise the need for a high school education that is necessary for post secondary education in the trades, and southern technical schools and universities. It is acknowledged that Metis students attending these schools may also need counselling and other assistance. With enough money the program may be expanded in the future to serve students in the south.

#### **Adult Education**

Many Metis Locals are involved in the Pathways Program which is in the early stages of implementation. It is important that the resources for this program are aimed at the most needy areas in each community so that those adults participating in the program become more able to participate in economic opportunities and the overall leadership for, and management of family and community issues.

In addition to these specific educational initiatives the Metis Nation should request and participate in an overall review of public education and how it is delivered in the Northwest Territories. This review should examine issues like the high dropout rate in both junior and high school, the high number of "graduates" who do not meet requirements for the post secondary education or training of their choice, the role of

the family and community in operating the schools, and the many related issues that delivering an effective educational program depend on.

**It is recommended that:**

- **the Metis Nation secure the services of an education professional to assist the locals in their efforts to improve education for their children, and**
- **each Metis Local establish a school support group to work with schools in Kindergarten to grade 9, and**
- **the Metis Nation establish a program for counselling and tutoring Metis high school and Arctic College students.**
- **the Metis Nation request and participate in an overall review of public education and how it is delivered in the Northwest Territories.**

#### **MEDICAL BENEFITS FOR METIS**

The Metis leadership both at the territorial level and the national level have stressed the need for equality of treatment of aboriginal people in Canada. The Metis Nation in the Northwest Territories is confident that health benefits for Metis will be in place as soon as a formal enumeration of Metis persons in the Northwest Territories can be completed and verified. This is necessary to accurately estimate the funding needed to extend health benefits to Metis patients.

It is expected that Metis will thereafter receive the same medical services as are provided to Dene, Inuit and Inuvialuit.

**It is recommended that:**

- **the Metis Nation leadership continue to work with the GNWT to complete the Metis enumeration and then secure the necessary funding for health services to Metis.**

#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR METIS**

In recent years efforts into economic development for Metis have been channelled through the Metis Development Corporation. MDC was established in 1977 by the Metis Association of the Northwest Territories, as it was known at the time, and its Locals. The 1979 Assembly in Ft. Smith endorsed MDC as the "economic arm" of the Metis Association. Corporate direction established at the time included a mixture of business and social goals and objectives which included:

- maximize value of shareholders' investment;
- develop land and resources and produce goods and services in an overall context of social responsibility;
- be a good corporate citizen in all communities where the corporation operated;
- assist regions and communities to establish an economy and society which reflect Metis values and lifestyle.

These broad goals and objectives and numerous sub-objectives which followed were developed in a very different economic climate than we have today. In 1977 there was a very real expectation of mega-project resource development in the Metis homeland as well as a land claim settlement which would deliver significant amounts of cash that could facilitate independent participation in resource development and other economic ventures for the benefit of Metis people. In 1992, 15 years since MDC was established, there has been much less resource development than expected, and there has not been a land claim settlement for most of the Metis people.

MDC has examined its operations to respond to today's economic realities and to find better ways to serve its Metis shareholders in particular, and the Metis people of the Northwest Territories generally. This review has raised several questions on how MDC can better fill the economic development role expected of it by its shareholders and the Metis people generally.

1. Are the goals and objectives of MDC as developed in 1977 adequate for today's economic environment and the new corporate structure of MDC?
2. Can the MDC board serve its shareholders and also be an effective voice for Metis economic development at the local and regional level?
3. How can MDC be more effective in communicating its corporate message to its shareholders and to the Metis people generally?
4. How can MDC fulfil its original role as economic development advisor to the Metis Nation and business consultant to Metis Locals, individual Metis entrepreneurs and businesses?

The authors of this draft action plan are fully aware that MDC is an independent corporation controlled by a board of directors that are accountable to MDC shareholders and not to the Metis Nation. Regardless of these facts, the authors believe that MDC remains a tool that can serve Metis people in the future. In reviewing priorities in 1991, the Metis people indicated that economic development for

Metis must be addressed. In developing an economic development strategy the Metis Nation should perhaps first answer a fundamental question:

Is MDC the preferred vehicle for Metis economic development in the Northwest Territories for business opportunities where either the risk and/ or equity required is greater than an individual can handle?

In answering that question several characteristics of MDC might be considered.

1. MDC is 100% Metis owned.
2. Every Metis person in the Northwest Territories is eligible, for a nominal sum of \$5.00, to be a voting shareholder in MDC.
3. MDC has a multi-million dollar asset base from which to serve its shareholders.
4. MDC has 15 years experience in the northern economic environment managing investment, participating in joint ventures, managing properties, and more recently, ownership in retail, service and tourist businesses.
5. MDC has a strong track record in establishing a partnership with government funding programs to serve aboriginal people in and entering the business world.
  - MDC delivers the CAEDS (Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy) program in the western Northwest Territories under contract to the Government of Canada.
  - MDC owns 50% of a lending institution with a pool of capital accessible to Metis and Dene entrepreneurs.

The authors of this draft action plan would advise that the Metis Nation confirm MDC as the preferred vehicle for Metis investment and economic development where the risk and /or equity necessary is greater than individual Metis business persons can handle. In doing so, the Metis Nation could request that MDC further develop consulting and advisory services to Metis entrepreneurs and businesses so that Metis persons are better equipped in preparing for business opportunities at the community level. Perhaps more important than preparation of entrepreneurs for business is the help and advice necessary to stay in business. Many northern businesses fail because the owner/operator lacks skills in managing cash, especially when the business starts with debt that requires monthly interest payments. Services to businesses should include "after care" for entrepreneurs entering the business world.

There may be numerous business opportunities emerging in response to the GNWT implementing the decentralization and privatization recommendations of the Beattie

report. MDC is well positioned to explore opportunities in partnership with, and provide support and assistance to local Metis entrepreneurs and businesses.

Some economic development programs that are currently available to northern businesses make a distinction between communities, and between aboriginal and non-aboriginal applicants and route the application accordingly. The response time for programs that deal with non-aboriginal applications for capital is generally shorter than that of its aboriginal counterpart. The Metis Nation Executive should request a review of the policies that create such discrimination as well as the procedures that result in costly delays for aboriginal applicants.

**It is recommended that:**

- **the Metis Nation reaffirm MDC as the preferred vehicle for investment and economic development, and,**
- **the Metis Nation executive work with MDC to secure personnel from government and/or industry on secondment, or secure funding for MDC to hire professional personnel to provide business development, planning and after care services for Metis business people in the Northwest Territories.**
- **the Metis Nation request a review of government policies that distinguish between applicants resulting in costly delays for aboriginal applicants.**

## **REDUCE ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROBLEMS**

The Metis Nation cannot reduce alcohol, drug and solvent abuse problems for its members. Little, if anything, can be done in the absence of the will by the individual to change his or her habits and related behaviour. Society is generally aware of the pain and suffering that is caused by abuse of alcohol and drugs and the related family and spousal violence. The Metis leadership is powerless to change the habits of its members. It can however set an example of sobriety and promote a standard of zero tolerance for violent and other abusive behaviour against children and spouses. The Metis leadership can stand up and say it will not hide the truth about member's addictions and related problems, rather it will encourage openness and honesty so that members with problems can be encouraged to seek treatment, recovery and then contribute to the overall healing that is needed in the community.

The Metis Nation leadership could also consider developing a code of conduct that each Metis Local president and director might volunteer to adopt. The code would promote sobriety, honesty and zero tolerance for abuse and violence.

Developing, adopting and putting a code of conduct into daily use and promoting a process of openness and healing from past abuses will help establish a strong and healthy Metis Nation.

**It is recommended that:**

- the Metis Nation leadership develop a voluntary code of conduct with respect to the use of alcohol and non prescription drugs, which will also promote zero tolerance for spousal assault and family violence.
- the Metis Nation seek financial and personnel resources to assist Locals in the healing necessary to recover from past problems of alcohol abuse and related behaviour; and
- materials be developed to sensitize Metis youth to the costs and effects of alcohol and substance abuse.

## **METIS HERITAGE AND CULTURE**

The Metis Nation is blessed with an abundance of healthy pride in the heritage its elders bring to it. There has been an active program of heritage documentation, preservation and publication by the Metis Heritage Association.

Although funding is important in the work of the Metis Heritage Association, it is equally important to its work for the Metis people to volunteer their effort and knowledge, especially in documenting the written and oral history of the elders, and the Michif language of many of the elders. Without a larger effort that may come only by way of volunteers, the materials for publishing Metis heritage and culture in books, tapes and video for Metis and the general public will not be possible.

The recent developments in northern native broadcasting provide a further opportunity to produce examples of Metis history, art and music for broadcast throughout northern Canada.

**It is recommended that:**

- the Metis Heritage Association remain the organisation charged with documenting and publishing Metis heritage and culture in the Northwest Territories, and
- the Metis Nation draw the attention of funding agencies to the inequality of funding that is provided for the documentation and preservation of Metis heritage, culture and language when compared to other aboriginal organizations, and

- **the Metis Heritage Association be encouraged to continue work in:**
  - **Metis oral history,**
  - **Metis written history,**
  - **the Michif language of the Metis,**
  - **Metis heritage materials for school curricula.**

## **SETTLE METIS LAND CLAIMS**

Resolving the outstanding Metis land claim in the Northwest Territories is in part tied to the ongoing constitutional evolution of self government for aboriginal people in Canada. The Metis leadership cannot set the land claims schedule or agenda without the cooperation of other parties at the territorial and national levels. This action plan is therefore unable to offer detailed proposals to settle the Metis land claim. Nevertheless, it seems realistic to assume that the right for Metis self government will be established either in the national constitution, or by bilateral negotiations with the Government of Canada. Realizing the full potential of self government for the Metis and implementing the Metis land claim will require leadership and management training.

**It is recommended that:**

- **funding for leadership and management training for Metis be incorporated into the overall self government and land claim negotiation strategy when it is developed.**

## **IMPROVE METIS ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS**

This subject is addressed in the recommendations regarding the Metis economic development.

## **SUPPORT FOR METIS YOUTH**

The challenge of ensuring wholesome and productive activities for youth is a problem faced by all of society. Several of the initiatives proposed in this action plan (like education) are aimed directly at Metis young people. Activities for youth can be created when project monies are available for specific activities, like the shoreline clean-up of Great Slave Lake funded by the Arctic Environment Strategy. Programs specifically for youth by the Metis Nation headquarters however would take away from initiatives that should be addressed by families and communities. It would be improper for the Metis Nation to conduct activities for people and communities that they could and should do better for themselves.

The staff and resource people at the Metis Nation remain available to help the Locals in preparing funding proposals and implementing projects that have been funded.

### FUNDING FOR METIS HOUSING

Housing in the Northwest Territories is a program of the NWT Housing Corporation managing monies that are guaranteed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. They provide for two types of housing:

- publicly owned housing that is rented to low income families at a subsidized rent, and
- home owner assisted houses (HAP).

Most of the houses funded in the western NWT are HAP homes which cost about one tenth of that of low rental homes when one considers the life time costs of the unit. Many Metis families are in homes they have built themselves without government help. Some Metis families live in HAP homes. Both require ongoing maintenance.

In a time of shrinking budgets for social housing it is important that the existing housing stock is kept in good repair since it will be much cheaper to keep it up than to replace it.

Also, existing programs of the NWT Housing Corporation do not provide assistance for Metis people in the larger communities. While HAP homes are built in Ndilo and Dettah, Metis in Yellowknife may not be eligible for HAP support because the program does not operate where there is an active housing market.

From time to time there is an opportunity for a Local to embark on a housing project at the community level. The Metis Nation supports such initiatives and should encourage all Locals to pursue such opportunities with the appropriate funding partner.

It falls within the mandate of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation to invite the Metis Nation into the process of developing, implementing and reviewing its programs. The Metis Nation requests that the "tripartite agreement" which provides for such participation for the Metis Nation be implemented.

**It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Metis Nation monitor housing policies and programs to ensure that programs like HAP and HIP (home improvement program) continue and that funds are available to assist Metis elders, single Metis parent families and Metis families in poverty to maintain their homes in acceptable condition, and

- **NWT Housing Corporation programs be reviewed so that Metis in larger urban centres are eligible for support on the same basis as if they live in smaller, more remote communities.**
- **the NWT Housing Corporation activate a "tripartite agreement" which provides for Metis participation in planning and designing housing policies and programs.**

## **METIS NATION FINANCIAL OVERVIEW**

The following summary shows how the funds available to the Metis Nation have shrunk in recent years. Funding for Metis Locals however remains an important target for Metis Nation monies and should continue and increase.

The money available to the Metis Nation will not support new programs at headquarters or with the Locals. Like headquarters, the locals are called on to do more with less. The action plans that are described here will all require new funding. Those that treat the priorities established at the 1991 assembly in an acceptable manner should be endorsed so that funding for them can be pursued.

Funding alone however cannot produce results. Volunteer efforts are needed, especially in the education and heritage work that is recommended. Money cannot duplicate the effort of dedicated volunteers working for the benefit and growth of others.

**It is recommended that:**

- **the inequality of core funding for Locals be brought to the attention of federal agencies who provide funding for aboriginal institutions, and that core funding for Locals be part of the land claims and self government negotiation strategy.**