

# Snapshot of the Nation

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**An Overview of the Métis Nation's Governance Structures and Institutions**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Snapshot of the Nation (“*Snapshot*”) document was prepared by the Métis National Council (MNC) in collaboration with the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), the Métis Nation - Saskatchewan (MNS), the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) and the Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia (MPCBC) [hereinafter referred to as “Governing Members”]. It provides a detailed overview of the Métis Nation’s current governance structures and institutions at a national, provincial and community level. The *Snapshot* also highlights the programs and services delivered to Métis people through these infrastructures and the benefits and measurable results achieved from these initiatives.

Overall, the *Snapshot* was designed to foster an understanding and appreciation of the capacity, ability and effectiveness of the Métis Nation’s governance structures and institutions within Canada. Based upon the evidence documented within the *Snapshot*, key issues, messages and findings have been identified for this Executive Summary.

## THE MÉTIS NATION

### The Métis Nation within Canada

Throughout history the Métis people have acted collectively to protect and fight for their rights, land and on-going existence as an Aboriginal people within west central North America.

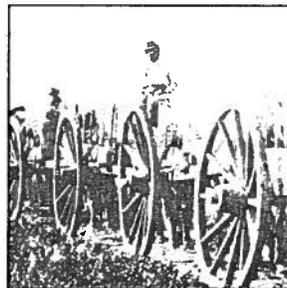
Today, this collective continues to exist from Ontario westward. Historic communities throughout the Homeland, like Fort Frances (ON), St. Laurent (MB), Green Lake (SK), Lac St. Anne (AB) and Fort Nelson (BC) continue to keep the Métis Nation’s distinct culture, language, values and traditions alive. As well, significant numbers of Métis people are now a part of urban communities within Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia; however, even within these larger populations, well-defined Métis communities exist.

It is estimated that the Métis Nation’s population is approximately 300,000 - 350,000 citizens; however, a completely accurate count is not currently available due to the absence of a complete enumeration and registry of the Métis people within Canada.

### The Métis National Council

Métis people and their communities from throughout the Métis Nation provide representative mandates to their provincial governance structures (Governing Members) from Ontario westward.

The MNC is formed by the Governing Members coming together to mandate a national governance structure. The President of each Governing Member sits as a member of the MNC’s national governance structure (Board of Governors), along with a



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# COMMON MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE MÉTIS NATION

In order to appreciate the findings of the *Snapshot* there is a need to first clarify some of the misconceptions and misunderstandings commonly held by parliamentarians, bureaucrats and the public-at-large.

Some of these include:

- It is a myth that, the Métis are nothing more than individuals who claim they have mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry. In reality, the Métis Nation is an identifiable and distinct nation of Aboriginal people that have existed and continue to exist within west central North America. The genesis of the Métis people was more than just a mixing or adaptation of two divergent cultures. It was a continual evolution that culminated in the birth of a distinct Aboriginal nation with its own unique history, language, music, dance, culture, self-government, dress and way of life. Throughout history the Métis people have acted collectively to protect and fight for their rights, land and on-going existence as an Aboriginal people within Canada.
- It is a myth that, Métis have access to and are provided assistance from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (“DIAND”). In reality, the Métis have no access and receive no benefit from the billions of federal dollars expended through DIAND annually.
- It is a myth that, Métis are included within “Aboriginal” initiatives announced by the federal government. Federal Ministries often use the term “Aboriginal”; however, they exclude the Métis from access to these initiatives because of a lack of understanding of the Métis Nation’s unique needs and governance structures or they use the federal government’s position with respect to jurisdiction vis a vis the Métis to avoid addressing Métis needs and issues.
- It is a myth that, the Métis have established processes to address their outstanding claims within the Canadian federation. On the contrary, the constitutionally protected rights and the long outstanding relationship issues between the Métis Nation and Canada are not being addressed. In many cases this has forced the Métis to seek justice through the judiciary. Current federal policy takes the position that the Government of Canada will not “negotiate” with the Métis and refuses to recognize that Métis have existing rights and interests that need to be reconciled within the Canadian federation.



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## Community-Based

At the heart of the Métis Nation's governance structures are its communities. Each Governing Member has established community governance structures (i.e. Locals, Community Councils etc.) which provide Métis people with:

- effective representation,
- community decision-making authority, and
- various cultural and socio-economic programs and services.

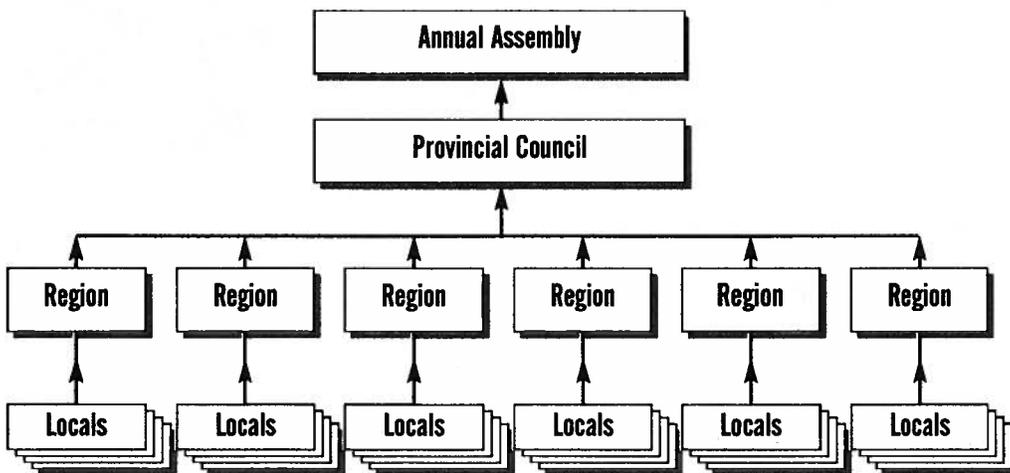
These community governance structures play a pivotal role within the Governing Members. For example, regional representation is elected to bring forward community issues and concerns to the provincial governing body. As well, representation from communities participate within the Governing Members' annual assemblies which provide direction to the provincial governance structure.

Each Governing Member has established policies and procedures for community governance to ensure openness, accountability and transparency. For example, in order for a local or community council to maintain active status within the Governing Member, it must have a minimum amount of public meetings, must hold elections at regular intervals and must provide the community with identified information (i.e. financial statements, list of assets etc.). The organizational chart below illustrates the community-based governance model employed throughout the Governing Members.



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### Model Governing Member Governance Structure



Every member on these lists has the right to participate within their respective Governing Members' governance structure (i.e. right to vote in provincial elections, right to seek political office, right to participate within assemblies, right to access programs/services etc.).

Currently, the Governing Members do not receive adequate resources to maintain their membership lists. However, Governing Members continue to work on improving and enhancing their capacity in this area. The MNC and its Governing Members continue to advocate for the federal government to resource the establishment of a Métis Nation Registry which would build upon these established membership lists and clearly identify the Métis Nation's citizens within Canada.

### **Democratic**

Since the days of Riel, the Métis people have staunchly believed in and have fought for democracy. A requirement for a Governing Member's membership within the MNC is holding a province-wide ballot box election for its provincial governing body at regular intervals. Within these elections, all members (minimum age requirements vary) of the Governing Members have the right to vote based on the 'one person - one vote' principle.

Based on these elections, the President and provincial board of the Governing Member receive the mandate to represent the Métis Nation within their respective province. As well, consistent with this democratic principle, the leadership within Métis communities are elected at regular intervals pursuant to established codes and procedures.

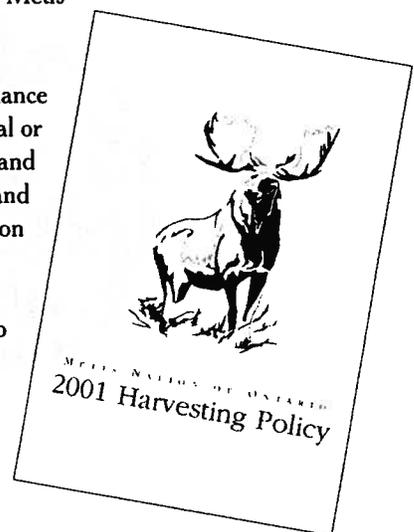
Each Governing Member has an established and published electoral code for its elections. As well, an independent Chief Electoral Officer is appointed to ensure the elections are undertaken in accordance with the established electoral code. Election notices listing all candidates for office are published, campaign guidelines are established and monitored, polling stations are set up in communities across the provinces and appointed poll clerks oversee the voting on behalf of the Chief Electoral Officer within the communities.

### **Innovative**

Currently, the MNC and its Governing Members are legally incorporated under some form of not-for-profit or societies legislation. Quite often, these corporate models do not provide the MNC or its Governing Members with the required governance tools needed to implement the Métis Nation's inherent right to self-government; however, even within these limitations the Métis Nation has developed innovative approaches.

For example, some Governing Members have established their own governance and legislative structures through a constitution authorized outside of provincial or federal legislation, while maintaining an incorporated secretariat for legal and administrative purposes. As well, some Governing Members have passed and implemented their own legislation and/or policies in areas of Métis jurisdiction (i.e. membership, harvesting, internal constitution etc.).

As the Métis Nation's governance structures and institutions continue to evolve there is a need to ensure it has the tools required to move forward. Currently, governments within Canada have been unwilling to address the substantive Métis self-government issues that go along with this evolution (i.e. recognition of Métis jurisdiction, Métis rights etc.).



## **Lack of Métis Access in Specific Sectors**

The *Snapshot* is interesting not only for the initiatives and results being achieved in specific sectors; but, also for those it says nothing about. Currently, there is a void in specific sectors due to:

- a lack of investment in resources,
- a lack of willingness to develop a relationship with the Métis Nation on the part of specific Ministries, and
- a lack of any consistent policy vis a vis Métis within the federal system.

Some of the more challenging sectors include:

### **Health**

Although there is a significant investment in “Aboriginal” health by the federal government, the Métis Nation receives little to no access to these resources and has no on-going relationship with Health Canada to address its health issues. Over the past few years, numerous attempts at forging a relationship with this Ministry have been undertaken to no avail. This is a priority area for the Métis Nation because Métis health indicators are well below the Canadian average and comparable to other Aboriginal peoples; however, current investments made in the health of other Aboriginal peoples (i.e. First Nation and Inuit) exclude the Métis.

### **Justice**

The past Aboriginal Justice Strategy, administered through the Department of Justice, almost entirely excluded Métis Nation access. In addition, initiatives like Crime Prevention, Youth Justice and Community Policing have little to no Métis involvement.

### **Economic Development**

Métis communities have little to no access to resources that would allow for them to become engaged in community-based economic development leading towards self-sufficiency. For example, the \$175 million invested annually in DIAND’s economic development programs completely exclude Métis. As well, other economic development initiatives through regional agencies (i.e. Western Economic Diversification, FedNor) do not adequately meet the unique needs of the Métis Nation.

### **Governance**

Métis governance structures do not receive adequate resources to carry out their mandates. The current Aboriginal Representative Organization Program (AROP), which provides funding for representative functions, does not meet the funding needs of the MNC or its Governing Members. AROP continues to be maintained at funding levels from the 1960’s and has never been indexed for inflation or increased based on additional governance demands (i.e. dispute resolution mechanisms, elections, membership maintenance etc.).

As well, Métis governance structures need to meet the demands of the new millennium and do not currently have the resources to address these needs. For example, there is currently no significant resources available for capital purchases, upgrading systems and equipment or connectivity by the MNC and its Governing Members.

### **Economic Development:**

Although little to no dedicated federal resources are made available to Métis communities for economic development initiatives there is moderate activity in the area of business development and financing through Aboriginal Capital Corporations (ACC) created by the Governing Members. Currently, the MNO and MPCBC do not have ACCs to assist Métis entrepreneurs respectively within Ontario and British Columbia.

Although the MMF, MNS and MNA ACCs are extensively undercapitalized and do not have resources to assist large scale community economic development initiatives, they have been extremely successful in assisting individual entrepreneurs. For example, since 1984 the MNA's ACC (Apeetogosan Development Inc.) has lent out over \$27 million to Métis and Non-Status Indian business people (this is a three time recycling of the original capital pool of \$8.8 million). In its 18 years of existence, Apeetogosan's support services and loans have assisted in the creation of over 700 new businesses and 2,000 new employment opportunities (*Snapshot* at p. 116). Similarly, the MMF (Louis Riel Capital Corporation) and MNS (Saskatchewan Native Economic Development Corporation) ACCs have been extremely successful but undercapitalized.

### **Housing:**

Even with the devastating on-going federal transfer of social housing to the provinces, the Governing Members continue to be important players within this area and continue to advocate for an improved federal strategy.

Most Governing Members, with the exception of MPCBC, are actively involved in the management and delivery of Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Emergency Repair Program (ERP) and Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) on a fee-for-service basis. These programs provide some financial profits for Governing Members.

As well, the MNO and MMF continue to manage approximately 2,400 units under the Rural and Native Housing Program, while the MNA and MNS have established urban housing corporations that own and manage some 1,600 housing units under the Urban Native Housing Program.



**In order to address the pressing socio-economic needs of the Métis Nation a strategic investment of resources is required**

## Current Best Practices

Although some federal Ministries have been ineffective in working with the Métis Nation, others have developed positive partnerships that realize success for all parties.

Through the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy (AHRDS), the MNC and its Governing Members play a pivotal role in addressing the labour market needs of the Métis Nation in partnership with Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC). The *Snapshot* demonstrates the practical results being achieved in this area. By dealing bilaterally with the MNC and its Governing Members on the AHRDS, HRDC has overcome the difficulties faced by other federal Ministries in effectively engaging the Métis Nation.

The Métis Nation also has a strong and positive partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) on various initiatives. For example, the MNC and its Governing Members act as DCH's partners in the Aboriginal Representative Organization Program (AROP), the Aboriginal Languages Initiative (ALI) and the Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centres (UMAYC) Initiative. These initiatives include a Métis-specific allocation which allows the Métis Nation to work with DCH in true partnership and strategically plan with these resources.

## Partnerships

The Métis Nation recognizes the value and need for partnerships with other stakeholders (i.e. private sector, Aboriginal service delivery organizations, municipalities etc.). In situations where the Métis Nation has the resources and ability to partner, successes have been achieved. For example, with resources available through the AHRDS, the Métis Nation has partnered on numerous initiatives for the benefit of all stakeholders (See *Snapshot* under Labour Market Programming sections).

However, the Métis Nation is often excluded as a partner in opportunities because of government policy or a lack thereof, a lack of access to resources (i.e. equity, land base) or common misunderstandings and misconceptions with respect to the Métis Nation.

As well, for partnerships to be successful they need to recognize and respect the mandate and jurisdiction of the MNC and its Governing Members (i.e. Métis governance structures are not just Aboriginal service delivery agencies).



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## RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS

The MNC and its Governing Members all have some form of an on-going relationship with the federal government. However, due to current federal “positions” vis a vis Métis, these relationships do not address the substantive legal and press socio-economic issues facing the Métis Nation. This results in an inability to move forward in practical terms in numerous areas.

Some of the key relationship themes and messages coming from the *Snapshot* include:

### Tripartite

Tripartite processes are on-going between the federal government, Governing Members and their respective provinces pursuant to the federal government’s *Federal Approach to the Implementation of the Inherent Right of Self-Government Policy*.

Overall, these processes have proven to be ineffective in their ability to address the Métis Nation’s long outstanding substantive issues and many of the pressing socio-economic needs of the Métis people. Due to the federal government’s position that it will not “negotiate” with the Métis Nation on substantive issues, no consistent federal policy vis a vis Métis, unsatisfactory financial resources to undertake practical initiatives and no real political will to move forward with the Métis Nation only minimal successes have resulted over the past decade.

The MNC and its Governing Members support on-going tripartite processes; however, a new pro-active approach and investment is needed.

### Bilateral

The MNC and its Governing Members maintain their position that many of the issues and interests of the Métis Nation are within federal responsibility and jurisdiction. The federal government continues to take a contrary view. This current state of affairs often impedes bilateral relations because there is prevalent view within the bureaucracy that innovative approaches with the Métis Nation may compromise the “federal position.” This standoff is unfair and irrational in the face of the urgent socio-economic needs and challenges facing the Métis Nation within Canada.

Currently, the MNC has a bilateral process with the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians (Interlocutor) through the Privy Council Office (PCO), Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat, which attempts to address “Métis self-government issues”. However, similar to the difficulties faced within the on-going tripartite processes, the bilateral process continues to be frustrated because of the lack of a clear understanding of the role of the Interlocutor and PCO within the federal system and the inability of the Interlocutor and PCO to move forward on dealing with Métis self-government in any real or tangible way. In the fiscal year 2000/01, the MNC tabled a series of recommendations to improve the current bilateral process; however, no formal response has been received yet and no improvements to the MNC/PCO bilateral process appear to be on the horizon.

It must be noted that some successful bilateral partnerships have been developed between the Métis Nation and specific federal Ministries (i.e. HRDC, DCH) irrespective of the ineffectiveness of established processes and a lack of a consistent Métis policy with the federal system. However, many ministries still have little to no substantive relationships with the Métis Nation (i.e. Health Canada, Department of Justice, Solicitor General, Corrections Canada, Industry Canada). It is hoped that the best practices with DCH and HRDC will guide future bilateral relations.

# Métis Nation Governments

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