

MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO BACKGROUND

MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO LAUNCH REVIEW TO PREPARE FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

On October 22nd, 2017, as an important step towards Métis self-government, the Provisional Council of the Métis Nation of Ontario (“PCMNO”) passed a resolution that has initiated a review of all MNO Registry citizenship files in order to prepare for the issuance of new MNO Citizenship Cards that will verify each new card-holder as a member of a rights-bearing Métis community and a Métis rights-holder under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

This review—which is being called the MNO Registry and Self-Government Readiness Process (the “RSRP”)—is being undertaken in anticipation of formal self-government and Métis rights negotiations beginning with Canada and Ontario in the near future. It is also being done because of the MNO’s steadfast position that **all** of its citizens are Métis rights-holders—not just Harvester Card holders. However, because of changes to the MNO citizenship definition over the years and a lack of capacity for the MNO Registry prior to 2004, there are some citizenship files that are incomplete and may not currently meet the requirements.

The RSRP will involve a review of all existing MNO citizenship files to determine whether they meet the requirements for MNO citizenship as set out in the MNO Bylaws and MNO Registry Policy, which align with the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision in *R. v. Powley* for the identification of Métis rights-holders. If a citizenship file is complete, that MNO citizen will automatically receive a new MNO Citizenship Card that identifies them as a Métis rights-holders. For many MNO citizens, they will simply receive a new card—free of charge—in the mail.

If there is documentation missing in a MNO citizen’s file, a letter will be sent to the citizen informing them of what is necessary to complete their file and they will be provided a reasonable amount of time to provide the necessary documentation to the MNO Registry. In addition, the MNO will be retaining the consulting firm KnowHistory to assist with this review, as they are widely recognized as leading researchers on Métis history in Ontario. Further, materials will be provided that will provide assistance and suggestions on how a citizen’s file could be completed, including, how to use the recently completed Ontario Métis Root Ancestors packages that are available at: <http://www.metisnation.org/registry/citizenship/ontario-métis-root-ancestors/>.

Through the RSRP, the MNO Registry will also be able to obtain a better understanding of exactly “who” the MNO represents for future negotiations on self-government and Métis rights. For example, as a part of the review the MNO will know how many of its citizens ancestrally connect to one of the seven recognized rights-bearing Métis



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communities in Ontario¹ as well as how many ancestrally connect to the Métis Nation in western Canada, but now live in Ontario.

In order to show leadership on this issue and provide MNO citizens certainty that they are being represented by Métis rights-holders at the regional and provincial levels, the RSRP will start with the elected leadership, beginning with the PCMNO.

The MNO will be developing additional communication products on the RSRP as well as create a dedicated webpage for MNO citizens to explain the process further.

QUICK FACTS

- The MNO was created in 1993 by Métis representatives from rights-bearing Métis communities across Ontario coming together to establish a province-wide, Métis-specific and democratic self-government representative body.
- The MNO's foundational purpose—as set out in the MNO Statement of Prime Purpose—is to advance Métis rights and self-government in Ontario. Central to this is ensuring that the MNO Registry is able to verify that MNO citizens are Métis rights-holders and the MNO knowing “who” it represents for the purposes of self-government and Métis rights negotiations.
- Since its creation, the MNO has maintained a centralized Registry in Ottawa to identify Métis citizens, however, since 1993, there have been significant political, legal and administrative developments, including changes to the MNO definition of Métis, which have impacted whether all existing MNO citizenship files are complete.
- The MNO currently has over 20,000 registered citizens. It is the MNO's position that *all* of these citizens are Métis rights-holders. Through the RSRP and issuance of new MNO Citizenship Cards, MNO citizens will have certainty that these files complete and they are a verified Métis rights-holder consistent with constitutional requirements and the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. v. Powley*.
- Individuals with complete citizenship files will automatically receive a new MNO Citizenship Card in the mail—at no cost to them. Individuals with incomplete files

¹ These identified Ontario Métis communities include the Georgian Bay and Environs Historic Métis Community, the Killarney and Environs Historic Métis Community, the Sault Ste. Marie and Environs Métis Community, the Northern Lake Superior Historic Métis Community, the Abitibi Inland Historic Métis Community, and the Mattawa / Ottawa River and Environs Historic Métis Community, the Rainy River / Lake of the Woods / Treaty 3 Historic Métis Community.

will receive a letter identifying why their current citizenship file is incomplete and what they need to provide in order to receive a new MNO Citizenship Card.

- In early 2017, the MNO and Canada signed a Memorandum of Understanding to Advance Reconciliation that contemplates arriving at a Framework Agreement that will set out a formal negotiations process to address Métis rights and self-government.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is this process meant to remove MNO citizenship from individuals?

A: No. This is about preparing the MNO for self-government negotiations, solidifying the integrity of the MNO Registry and demonstrating what MNO has always believed—that **all** of our citizens are Métis rights holders.

Q: Why is the MNO doing this?

A: The credibility of the MNO in future self-government and Métis rights negotiations is tied to its ability to say that it represents Métis rights-holders. This process will validate what the MNO has always believed—that **all** of our citizens are Métis rights holders.

Q: I thought all MNO citizens were “grandfathered”. Why is MNO doing this?

A: While it was previously decided to “grandfather” all MNO citizens who may have incomplete files (i.e. to not require them at that time to complete their files), this did not make these individual Métis rights-holders. In *Powley*, the Supreme Court of Canada made it very clear that “no matter how a contemporary community defines membership, only those members with a demonstrable ancestral connection to the historic community can claim a s. 35 right.” This process will verify that individuals who receive new MNO Citizenship Cards are Métis rights-holders.

Q: Will this process remove MNO citizens who do not ancestrally connect to the Red River Settlement or Métis communities in western Canada?

A: No. In order to be a MNO citizen, you can ancestrally connect to a historic Métis community in Ontario or to a historic Métis community in western Canada. In August 2017, the Ontario Government recognized with the MNO that there are, at a minimum, seven historic rights-bearing Métis communities throughout Ontario that meet the requirements of the *Powley* test. MNO citizens—who will

be identified as Métis rights-holders—can ancestrally connect to one of those seven historic Métis communities in Ontario or to the Métis Nation in western Canada.

Q: Can I still make an application to the MNO Registry for Citizenship or a Harvester Card while this process is ongoing?

A: Yes, the MNO Registry continues to process cards in accordance with the MNO Registry Policy as well as the MNO Harvesters Card Policy. The processing of pending applications remains the utmost priority.

Q: Am I still able to access MNO programs and services during this process?

A: Yes, there will be no impact on your ability to access MNO programs and services that are available to all MNO citizens and/or self-identifying Métis (who do not have a MNO Citizenship Card) during the review process.

Q: Is there a cost to me to moving forward with getting the new MNO Citizenship Card?

A: No, there will no charge for this process. If your citizenship file is complete, you will automatically receive a new MNO Citizenship Card in the mail—at no cost to you. If your file is incomplete in some way, you will receive a letter identifying what is needed. The MNO will provide as much assistance as possible to assist you in completing your citizenship file in order to issue a new MNO Citizenship Card.

Q: If I currently have a valid MNO Harvesters Card, will I automatically get a new MNO Citizenship Card.

A: Yes. All of the existing 1,450 MNO Harvester Card holders have already been validated as being Métis rights-holders. As soon as the new MNO Citizenship Cards are designed, these will be issued to the 1,450 valid MNO Harvesters Card holders as well as other MNO citizens who have completed files.

Q: Are there other benefits to issuing new MNO Citizenship Cards?

A: Yes, the new card is expected to include added security features to ensure it remains current, confidential and can be utilized as recognized government photo identification. Further, the card will provide a MNO citizen with the

confidence that they have been verified as a Métis rights-holder. The new cards can also be produced in a manner to specify the MNO citizen's historic rights bearing Metis community, which will provide greater certainty in ongoing Crown consultation and accommodation negotiations. And, it is anticipated that through self-government negotiations new programs and services will be made available.

Q: Are other Métis governments doing this?

A: Yes. Following *Powley*, the Métis Nation of Alberta undertook a process where all of its existing members needed to re-register to obtain new cards. In 2013, it cancelled its old cards and only now recognizes the new cards that identify Métis rights-holders. The Manitoba Metis Federation has a membership list that includes 50,000+ individuals, but has now re-registered 22,000 individuals with new cards that identify these individuals as Métis rights-holders.