



Press Release Attention News Editors

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Alberta Métis Table Petition on Harvesting in Legislature

Call on Alberta Government to 'Tear Up' Ted Morton's Flawed Policy

Edmonton, AB (November 29, 2007) – Today Pearl Calahasen, the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake, tabled a petition in the Alberta Legislature on behalf of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) in support of the Alberta Government respectfully accommodating Métis harvesting rights.

The petition, which was signed by approximately 2,400 Albertans, read:

We, the Métis people of Alberta and friends of the Métis, urge the Government of Alberta to continue to accommodate Métis harvesting for food, throughout the province of Alberta, through a negotiated harvesting agreement with the Métis Nation of Alberta. This agreement should build upon the Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement and allow for Métis harvesting to continue to take place where there is a Métis tradition of harvesting (excluding occupied Crown lands and private property where permission has not been obtained). ...

"I hope the Alberta Legislature hears the voices of the Métis people and our friends living throughout this province through this petition," MNA President Audrey Poitras said. "The message is clear: Ted Morton's unlawful, unilateral and regressive policy on Métis harvesting must be torn up to make way for a new approach that is based on respect, reconciliation and the rule of law. Mr. Morton's actions continue to tarnish the Alberta Government's well-earned reputation of being a leader in Crown-Métis relations and respecting Métis rights in this country."

The Métis people have a long history of using petitions to assert their rights and draw attention to injustices perpetuated against them across the Métis Homeland.

"Like our ancestors before us, the Métis Nation continues to use this means of respectful protest in Canada when our rights are being ignored by government. We only hope the Alberta Government will respectfully listen and act, rather than continuing with Ted Morton's current approach," President Poitras added.

MNA Minister for Métis Rights, Cecil Bellrose explained that Métis rights do not depend on Ted Morton's politics.

"Since Mr. Morton has decided to ignore his Ministerial responsibilities to protect Alberta's wildlife and act unilaterally, the Métis people have ignored his policy and have continued to harvest this fall, just as we have done for generations, Minister Bellrose said.

The MNA wants to work with the Alberta Government to implement the Points of Agreement reached between the MNA President and the Minister for International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations in May of this year, instead of ignoring Alberta's unconstitutional regulatory regime.

"We call on members of the Alberta Legislature to support us in arriving at a partnership on Métis harvesting, rather than Mr. Morton's strategy of confrontation and litigation," added Minister Bellrose.

"The MNA remains committed to working with the Alberta Government in partnership on Métis harvesting," President Poitras concluded. "The MNA has written to the Alberta Government outlining how good faith negotiations can resume on Métis harvesting. Until then, the MNA will continue to stand united on Métis rights by implementing our Action Plan and defending Métis harvesters against Ted Morton's unilateral and regressive Métis harvesting policy."

Background on Métis Harvesting in Alberta

In September 2004, the MNA and the Alberta Government entered into an Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement (IMHA) to accommodate Métis harvesting rights throughout Alberta based on the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in the *Powley* case. The IMHA worked effectively for over 2 ½ years.

In August 2006, the MNA and the Alberta Government engaged in renewed discussions for a longer-term agreement. Based on these negotiations, the MNA President and the Minister for International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations reached Points of Agreement for a new arrangement in May 2007. Unfortunately, Ted Morton, the current Minister for Sustainable Resources Development refused to work with the MNA to implement these Points of Agreement and cancelled the IMHA. Morton then adopted a unilateral and regressive policy on Métis harvesting in July 2007. This policy excludes Métis living in central and southern Alberta, ignores the Alberta Government's own research on Métis claims and draw arbitrary lines that limit traditional Métis harvesting practices.

In August 2007, the MNA Assembly unanimously rejected Ted Morton's policy. Since with the cancellation of the IMHA, Alberta laws do not accommodate Métis harvesting, the Assembly adopted its MNA Harvesting Policy and Métis harvesters will continue to exercise their constitutional rights pursuant to the MNA Policy, regardless of Ted Morton's policy. The MNA will support Métis harvesters who are following the MNA Harvesting Policy and charged by SRD. As well, the MNA Assembly adopted an Action Plan on Métis Harvesting that focuses on four areas: exercising Métis rights, defending Métis rights, political action on Métis rights and public education on Métis rights. For copies of these documents or more information visit www.albertametis.org :

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