

Opinion

Métis Nation of Ontario's attempt to gain self-government recognition is not right

Including the Métis Nation of Ontario in Bill C-53 would reward identity theft by thousands of individuals who've banded together to claim an identity, rights and benefits to which they are not entitled.

Clem Chartier

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The opinion piece by Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) President Margaret Froh in *The Hill Times* on Jan. 9, 2024, ("The

deception and duplicity in denying Ontario Métis") may make the case for the best defence being an offence, but it still falls far short.

The inclusion of MNO in Bill C-53, the Recognition of Certain Métis Governments in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, and Métis Self-Government Act, if passed as-is could reward identity theft by thousands of self-seeking, like-minded individuals who have banded together under the MNO to claim an identity, rights, and benefits to which they are not entitled. The current criteria used by the MNO to recognize members can be found at metisnation.org.

The federal government has acknowledged that in drafting the bill it did not first verify the legitimacy of the MNO registry system to ensure its members met the criteria for Sec. 35 rights entitlement including self-government. It appears that Canada relied on a statement by the Province of Ontario and the MNO in 2017 that, "in the spirit of reconciliation," identified six "new" historic Métis communities in Ontario.

On the face of it, that recognition of MNO's "new historic"

communities defied logic. How can these communities be new and historic at the same time? Some First Nations in Ontario strongly oppose the inclusion of MNO communities in Bill C-53 because they believe these communities never existed. They rightly question how it is possible that distinct Métis communities existed in their traditional territories for hundreds of years without their knowledge.

Likewise, we in the historic Métis Nation rooted in the Red River Settlement in Manitoba question how it is possible that distinct Métis communities existed historically in Ontario without our knowledge. When the Prairie Métis first allowed the Métis Nation of Ontario's predecessor body to join them in the Charlottetown Constitutional Round in 1992, it was on the basis of providing representation for those Prairie Métis who had moved to Ontario. In fact, the Métis Nation Accord resulting from those talks included the Ontario Métis representative body, and defined the Métis as descendants of those entitled to receive Métis land grants under the Manitoba



Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Gary Anandasangaree on the Hill on Oct. 4, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Act and Dominion Lands Act in Western Canada.

But the MNO has steadily broadened its membership since 1993, in the process admitting thousands of individuals with no connection to the historic Métis Nation rooted in Red River and its homeland in Western Canada, according to a 2018 resolution of the Métis National Council (MNC). After MNC established national citizenship criteria or national definition in 2002, the MNC concluded that the MNO grandfathered in a large number of members who had no proof of historic Métis Nation ancestry. It reinvented the national definition in its own image to create an organization which in great majority was not Métis, according to the MNC, culminating in its unilateral declaration of six "new historic" communities in 2017.

In 2018, MNO refused to submit to an examination of its membership registry as ordered by the MNC General Assembly in order to avoid suspension. The failure of the MNC Board of Governors to enforce the suspension led to the Manitoba Métis Federation withdrawing from the MNC in 2021.

The MNO membership registry would come under closer scrutiny again before Bill C-53 was introduced in June 2023. After blocking independent probes

of its membership registry which it argued was beyond reproach, the MNO suddenly expelled 5,400 members on March 1, 2023, on the grounds they had no proof of Métis ancestors. Furthermore, an examination of the research behind the "new historic" Métis communities submitted to House Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee on Nov. 17, 2023, by professor Darryl Leroux concluded that the "root ancestors" to whom the remaining MNO members tie their genealogies were in fact individuals who identified themselves and were recognized by the First Nations as Indians, not founders or members of distinct Métis communities.

By providing MNO with constitutionally protected jurisdiction over citizenship, Bill C-53 could open the floodgates to countless illegitimate rights claimants in Ontario. This would be a great disservice to all Indigenous peoples and their governments by trying to blur the distinctions between legitimate rights holders and the unfounded claims of members of made-up communities.

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The Hill Times