

Monday, September 22, 2003--Press Release

"We Won!" Métis Rights upheld by Supreme Court, Interim President Poitras calls the decision "A great victory for the Metis Nation"

OTTAWA, ON (September 19,2003) - In a landmark decision the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the lower courts judgments in the Métis harvesting rights case, R. v. Powley. The Supreme Court recognized that the Aboriginal rights of the Métis exist. Interim President and Spokesperson for the Métis National Council, Audrey Poitras said, "The highest court of this land has finally done what Parliament and the provincial governments have refused to do and have delivered justice to the Métis people." In a press conference carried live across Canada Interim President Poitras said, "To all the Métis people watching I want to say two words: We won. We won!"

"This decision is a great victory for the Métis Nation," said Poitras. The governments of Canada can no longer refuse to negotiate with the Métis Nation and treat us as though we don't have any Aboriginal rights. Those days are over."

Clem Chartier, the Métis National Council's Minister of Métis Rights and Self-Government said, "The judgments are as positive as we could have hoped. With R .v. Powley being an overwhelming victory and though R. v. Blais was rejected by the court there is still language in the decision that can be used to strengthen the Métis Nation."

R. v. Powley addressed whether the Metis community at Sault Ste. Marie had an Aboriginal right to harvest protected by s. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. "This case will set the test that a Métis community must meet in order to exercise their Aboriginal harvesting rights," said Minister Chartier. "Although this judgment is focused on Sault Ste. Marie, it is a victory for the whole Métis Nation."

The Métis National Council and their legal counsel will be analyzing the decisions in the days to come. "We will further develop our strategies, related to these decisions, and take the tool given to us today, to keep building and strengthening the Métis Nation. Once again we urge our people to continue to demonstrate patience and show respect for the traditional Métis values of conservation and public safety," said Interim President Poitras.

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