

NEWS RELEASE

Negotiations between Ottawa and Métis may do more harm than good

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VANCOUVER—Due to the ambiguity regarding who is—or isn't—Métis, and what constitutes Métis land, current negotiations between Ottawa and several Métis associations may create more problems than they will solve, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think tank.

“Unlike First Nations that have treaty rights and a legal relationship with Ottawa, there are no legal parameters defining the Métis and Ottawa’s responsibility towards Métis people,” said Tom Flanagan, Fraser Institute senior fellow, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Calgary and author of [*The Debate about Métis Aboriginal Rights—Demography, Geography, and History*](#).

The study notes that, in an effort to fulfill a 2015 campaign promise to engage in “nation-to-nation” negotiations with the Métis, the federal government has begun talks with Métis associations in Manitoba, Ontario and Alberta.

But provincial Métis associations, who claim to represent those descended from the Métis of the fur trade era, have enrolled only a fraction—approximately a quarter—of the people who identify as Métis in their provinces.

Across Canada, as of 2011, a total of 418,000 people identified as Métis, up sharply from 178,000 in 1991. Previous research has shown that between 70 and 80 per cent of that growth is the result of so-called ethnic mobility—Canadians who previously did not identify as Métis but do now.

If Ottawa awards financial benefits to the descendants of the fur trade Métis, hundreds of thousands of other Canadians who can claim some amount of indigenous ancestry might also request those benefits.

“Given the lack of legal clarity, it’s impossible to predict who would come forward to claim those benefits, and it would be extremely difficult to include some Métis but exclude other Canadians who also identify as Métis,” Flanagan said.

Another campaign promise—settling unresolved Métis land-claims—could also prove difficult given Canadians who identify as Métis are spread out across the country and often live in urban areas.

Outside of eight Métis communities in Alberta, there’s no clearly defined Métis land, making the promise of establishing self-government and settling land-claims problematic.

“If implemented, these campaign promises regarding the Métis may do great harm by spurring costly legal battles that could drag on for years,” Flanagan said.

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