



Maw-Lukuti'kw

Epekwitk Mi'kmaq Nationhood Gathering

September 28, 2019

## 1. Introduction

Maw-Lukuti'kw, The Epekwitk Nationhood Gathering took place on Saturday September 28, 2019 as the inaugural meeting of the Mi'kmaq community of Prince Edward Island to discuss the future of governance and nationhood in Epekwitk. The Gathering was intended to “lay the foundation for engagement sessions today and in the coming months aimed at articulating our collective vision for our Mi'kmaq Nation here in Prince Edward Island. This vision will guide us in our future work to protect and implement our constitutionally protected Mi'kmaq Rights and to truly achieve reconciliation with our non-Indigenous friends and neighbours.” The Gathering also introduced L'nuey, the new Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative. With its launch at the Gathering L'nuey became the organization responsible for negotiations, consultation and governance development, under the direction of the Mi'kmaq leadership.

All PEI Mi'kmaq were encouraged to attend and provide input into the visioning process with approximately 120 people in attendance. Both Chief Darlene Bernard and Chief Junior Gould spoke to the significance of the session and the hope for the future. Experts in nationhood and enrollment/membership were invited to speak to the assembled on the process and their past experiences. The reception to the event was positive and hopeful.

## 2. Summary of Presentations

Chief Darlene Bernard of Lennox Island First Nation started the day with an inspiring speech outlining how the gathering came about. She spoke of the creation of the new rights organization, L'nuey and outlined the intent of days session.

*I could begin with how our people, the L'nu, have been here on this Island for thousands of years...we are THE indigenous people of this Island...and of this region...we have inherent rights that extend to what some call “time immemorial” – however, we remember...there is an unbroken chain of generations of Mi'kmaq people who have lived, raised families, hunted, fished, sheltered one another during the harsh winters and celebrated the bounty of our Island summers...our traditions...our heritage...have been passed down to us...we remember...*

*I could begin with the Treaties...our ancestors agreement to move forward with European colonists in Peace and Friendship...ceasing the wars and conflict in Mi'kmaki...Treaties that were promptly ignored, or disregarded, and by some...forgotten...*

*I could begin with Residential Schools. I could begin with this attempt to rob our people of our heritage...of our memories...of our language...and ultimately our identity...and our future...*



*I could begin with the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution and the creation of Charter of Rights and Freedoms...and the affirmation in section 35(1) that: "The existing **aboriginal** and treaty **rights** of the **aboriginal** people in **Canada** are hereby recognized and affirmed. ... Existing **Aboriginal** land **rights** can no longer be extinguished without the consent of those **Aboriginal** Peoples holding interests in those lands."*

*Or I could begin with our decade of struggle to make these words live...*

*I could begin with the Marshall Decision...that happened just over 20 years ago...which is our clearest demonstration yet as to how by exerting our rights as Mi'kmaq people, we can sustain our people today AND strengthen those rights for future generations...*

*Or I could begin with TODAY...September 28, 2019...the first Epekwitk Mi'kmaq Nationhood Gathering...because today, we would like to mark a line in the sand...to mark where WE have taken the torch from those who came before...and assert, like never before, that we are the L'nu of Prince Edward Island... we are the Epekwitnewaq...it is now our job to affirm, exert and protect our rights as Mi'kmaq people.*

Elder Joel Denny of Eskasoni First Nation provided a blessing for the lunch feast and offered his insight and wisdom into the concepts being discussed throughout the day.

In the afternoon, following the visioning session, Councillor Wendall Labobe of Abegweit First Nation presented on L'nuey. His presentation including the introduction of the logo, the pillars of L'nuey (Negotiation, Consultation and Governance Development, through Communication, Engagement and Approval) and next steps.

Zabrina Whitman, Senior Policy Analyst with Nova Scotia's Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusaqn Negotiation Office (KMKNO) presented on the NS Enrollment Process and the intricacies of defining who had rights and who didn't. Her presentation was specific to hunting rights in Nova Scotia and was very informative on how difficult the process of defining beneficiaries can be.

Pam Palmeter, a well-known Mi'kmaq, lawyer, advocate and Professor of Politics and Public Administration at Ryerson University, provided a pre-taped message to the assembled around the importance of ensuring that the process reasserting nationhood comes from the Mi'kmaq.

The day ended with a speech from Chief Junior Gould outlining next steps for L'nuey and the engagement process for the Mi'kmaq of PEI. He announced the first ever celebration of Treaty Day in PEI and encouraged the assembled to attend the flag raising in Charlottetown

*In just three days' time, we will be celebrating the first ever OFFICIAL PEI Mi'kmaq Treaty Day! This will be proclaimed by Premier Dennis King – a true friend of the Epekwitnewaq. Thank you Premier King for this long awaiting declaration. This is a great start to a new relationship and an historic milestone for the Epekwitk L'nu.*



He also assured the assembled understood the importance of working together to ensure the visions advocated in the visioning session could be realized.

*We also know that engagement is a conversation – you need to know what is happening before decisions are made, you need to know that any decisions reflects the input of the Epekwitnewaq... So communication will be a centerpiece of this process. L'nuey! By getting involved in our consultations, community sessions, and events, you have the opportunity to help shape the future... for yourself... for your family...your community, and all the generations to come. L'nuey! ...Celebrate who you are, who we are, and take every opportunity to educate and raise awareness of our history and heritage and culture.*

### 3. Visioning Session

The group was presented with three questions around the concept of Mi'kmaq nationhood on Prince Edward Island as asked to provide their input. The intent of the exercise was to work toward developing a vision statement to guide the processes of L'nuey.

The three questions were:

1. What if we look beyond the Indian Act? What if we could design the future of our people?
2. What do we value as Mi'kmaq Nationhood? What are your long-term (10 year plus) priorities for the Mi'kmaq Nation?
3. Who will be the beneficiaries of Mi'kmaq rights and title in Epekwitk?

The groups worked on each question for approximately 20 minutes (with the assistance of a facilitator to keep everyone on track) and then reported back to the group. Some common themes developed.

#### **Question #1: What if we look beyond the Indian Act? What if we could design the future of our people?**

The predominant theme was a return to life before the Indian Act. And this was not limited to governance. People felt that along with a return to traditional Mi'kmaq governance structures, they needed to reclaim their language and culture as a foundation for governance. Central to this idea of returning to life before the Indian Act was the focus on traditional Mi'kmaq practices of land-based learning, traditional healing practices, traditional modes of justice, and environmental stewardship. Important for the return to traditional ways were the concepts of unity and inclusiveness.

#### **Question #2: What do we value as Mi'kmaq Nationhood? What are your long-term (10 year plus) priorities for the Mi'kmaq Nation?**

As with question one, there was a common theme of a return to the traditions of the PEI Mi'kmaq; a revitalization of the language and culture until this becomes the norm and not the exception. To be successful in this, there need to be programs to remove barriers for all members, particularly the children and the youth. Barriers created by the Indian Act (on reserve verses off reserve) need to be removed. The

barriers to membership also need to be removed and decided by the Mi'kmaq of PEI. Another central theme was the importance of healing. The central tenants of healing include supporting those impacted by the residential school systems and an increase in traditional gatherings where the Mi'kmaq can redefine the concept of community as they see it.

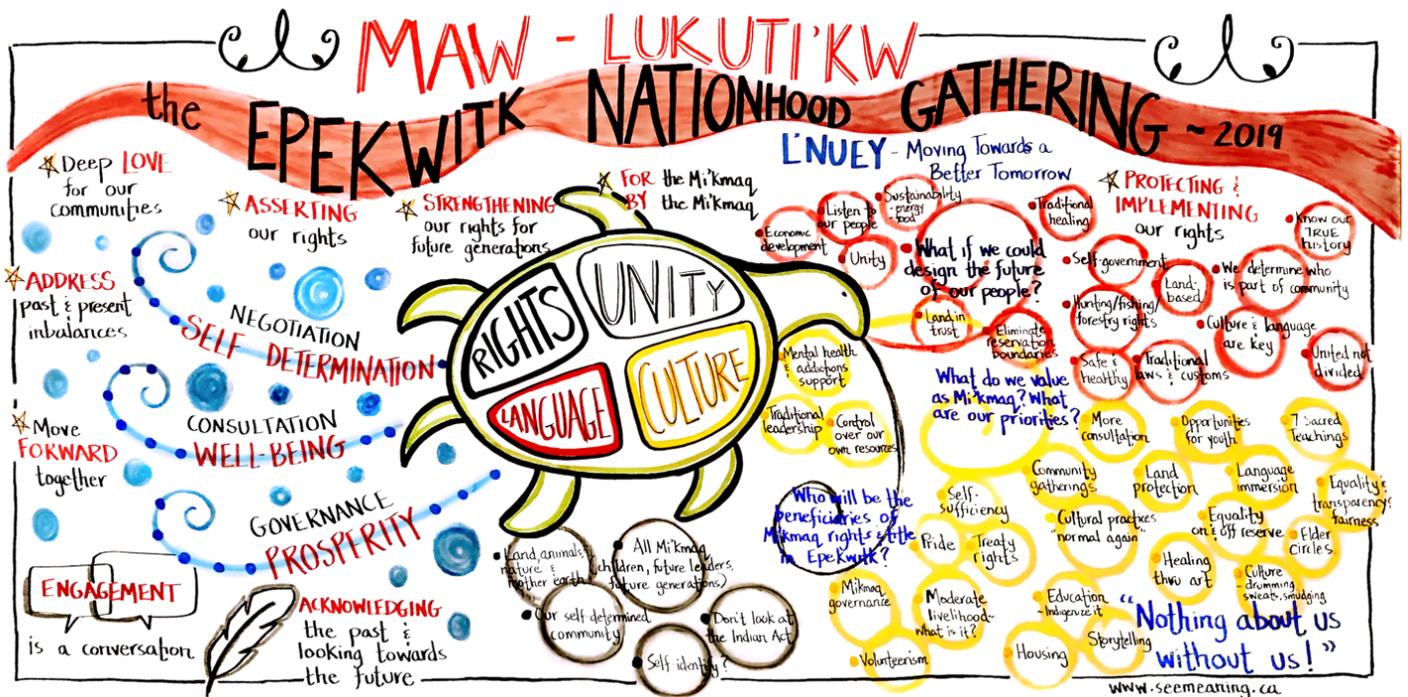
**Question #3: Who will be the beneficiaries of Mi'kmaq rights and title in Epekwitk?**

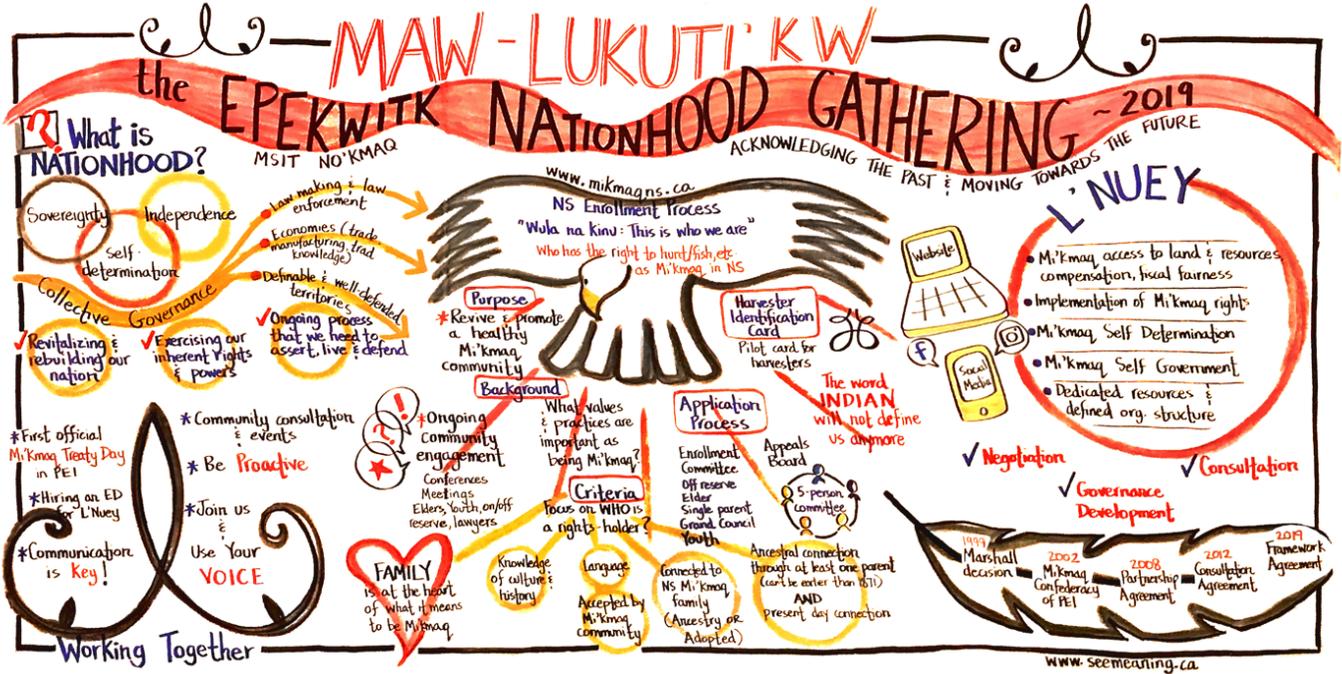
The group responses to who would be the beneficiaries was broad. The answers ranged from 'everyone claiming to be Mi'kmaq who lived on PEI' to 'our children' and at the wider end, 'Mother Earth and all who live on her.' What was clear is that this issue is one to be defined and determined by the Mi'kmaq of PEI. When asked this question, the answer seemed to be very clear but the more the conversation evolved, the more complex it became. This concept will require more consultation with the PEI Mi'kmaq community.

Common themes through all three questions included:

- Focusing on reclaiming traditions and language;
- Make the Mi'kmaq ways the norm and not the exception;
- Use the traditional teachings as a basis for governance;
- Importance of creating a better future for the children and youth;
- Unity and Inclusiveness.

**4. Visual Representation of Gathering**





## 5. Summary and Conclusion

Maw-Lukuti'kw, The Epekwitk Nationhood Gathering was the beginning of a new era for the Mi'kmaq of PEI. The September 28, 2019 meeting in Charlottetown introduced the Mi'kmaq people to their new rights-based organization L'nuey and laid the foundation for community consultation and engagement, now and into the future. Over the next year, there will be more opportunities for community members to provide their input into the work of L'nuey. As stated by the leadership and the community members, the future will be a self-governing Mi'kmaq nation on Prince Edward Island, built on a foundation of language, culture and traditions, and designed by the Mi'kmaq community as whole.

