I welcome this opportunity, as President of the Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations, to address this workshop on Elk Husbandry. I'm sure it will be useful to briefly outline some general background about the Alberta Metis Settlements before addressing more specifically the issues at hand.

There are, at present, eight Metis Settlements in northwestern and northeastern Alberta. The names of the settlements are Big Prairie, Caslan, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino and Paddle Prairie, and in total they represent a land base of about one and one-quarter million acres. This is the only collectively held, legislatively established Metis land base in Canada. There are approximately 4500 Metis residents on the Settlements.

I would like to speak briefly on this historical establishment of the settlements, the structure of the self-governing body and the Metis settlements' economic development mechanism.

It was on the plains of western Canada in the late 18th century that the Metis nation developed. As generations passed, a unique lifestyle, culture and livelihood emerged.

As development of the country progressed, more and more eastern Canadian and European settlers moved westward and the Metis traditions and lifestyle were threatened. This resulted in the Metis resistances in the Red River settlement area in 1870 and in Batche and Duck Lake in 1885. The Metis, in an effort to preserve their traditional lifestyle, land and resources, and to avoid further conflict, moved farther west and north into what is now Alberta. During the depression of the 1930's, the Metis' living conditions deteriorated to such a degree that certain Metis leaders began lobbying the Provincial Government.

As a result of the pressure by the Metis, in December, 1934, the Alberta Government established the "Royal Commission Appointed to Investigate the Conditions of the Half-Breeds of Alberta" - commonly referred to as the "Ewing Commission".

The Ewing Commission held a number of discussions and consultations with Metis people of Alberta. It is interesting that the Commission was appointed to investigate the "Health, Education and General Welfare" of the Metis population and that there was no mention of a land settlement. Despite this, no one involved in the Commission seemed to doubt that the establishment of settlements for the Metis would be the main outcome of the Commission.
Following the recommendations of the Ewing Commission, the Metis Betterment Act was passed in 1938. It set aside land for Metis and provided for the establishment of Settlement Associations to occupy the land. The Metis Betterment Act, and the ten Alberta Regulations struck pursuant to it, have a great influence on the lives of the Metis settlers. Besides setting aside land for the Settlements, it also created a system of local government in the form of Settlement Association Councils. These Councils, which consist of five members democratically elected by the Settlement Association, have the power to enforce the rules and regulations in the Metis Betterment Act affecting land allotment, membership, hunting, fishing and trapping, timber, grazing, surface rights, and the administration of funds. In other words, the Councils make important decisions affecting Metis settlers on a daily basis.

The Federation of Metis Settlements was incorporated in May, 1975, to provide a unified political voice for the eight Metis settlements of Alberta. The Federation is governed by a twelve member Board of Directors consisting of the Chairman of each Settlement Council and four Executive Officers, elected at large for two year terms from the Membership of the Settlement Associations.

The economic development arm of the Metis settlements is also important in terms of developing an active and viable wildlife ranching industry. Settlement Sooniyaw Corporation is the economic and business development organization representing the eight Metis settlements in Alberta. The Corporation was conceived in the late 1970's and federally incorporated under the Canada Business Corporations Act in October 1980. It was officially launched in January, 1982, when the Settlements purchased share certificates and contributed start-up capitalization to the organization.

The overall objective of the Corporation is to encourage local economic development, control and self-reliance on the Metis Settlements. The more specific goals of the organization are as follows:

1. To support development of businesses that provide employment and ownership opportunities to residents;

2. To develop local capacity for self-directed sustained economic growth; and

3. To develop an independent system of capital assets and mechanisms capable of accessing traditional capital sources.

Over the past two years, Settlement Sooniyaw Corporation has become operational and has successfully launched a number of economic development initiatives.

The traditional "cultural economy" of the Metis nation and of the Metis on the Settlements has been one of hunting, fishing and trapping. The reliance on wildlife in that system is obvious. The Metis have a long history of relationships with elk and wildlife in general, as a means of subsistence. With the re-establishment of a Metis land base via the Metis Settlements in Alberta, the opportunities for farming, ranching and other
more sedentary methods of livelihood re-emerged. The lifestyle of the Metis on the Settlements improved, and we became established rural residents of the province.

With this modification in lifestyle, however, we saw no reason to abandon the means of livelihood that the Metis had relied upon and with which we had many years and generations of tradition and experience.

The Metis are, as you all know, an aboriginal or indigenous people of this country. The elk and other wildlife that were and are important in the cultural economy of the Metis are, of course, indigenous animals. There is nothing surprising in the fact that we have and do rely on these animals for subsistence and that in doing this, we have built up an expertise in the area. From obtaining food and clothing through hunting and trapping, we have experienced these animals in their natural habitat – from this we have – over a great deal of time – come to know their environment and other characteristics that are important for them to survive and flourish.

I would like to speak briefly about the ABORIGINAL RIGHT of the Metis to participate in their "cultural economy".

The Metis people are seeking constitutional recognition of their right to hunt, fish, trap and gather food according to our traditions. We are seeking affirmation of this right for the purpose of obtaining food and for the commercial development of such resources, through the Aboriginal constitutional process and through our participation in the review of the Metis Betterment Act and Regulations. Such a right would be subject to sound management of the resources and to conservation practices.

The Metis people do not want management and conservation practices to be arbitrarily set and enforced on us without our consent. To this end, we are striving for a constitutional right to be involved in the development of such management and conservation programs jointly with the level of government with jurisdiction on a given area. In the event that such programs require closed seasons, quotas or other restrictions on harvesting rights, the Aboriginal people want to receive first priority access to these surface resources.

The Metis who earn a livelihood from traditional economic activities resent the wildlife management systems imposed on them by the provinces and government biologists. As Aboriginal people, Metis believe they can manage wildlife resources more efficiently than government.

We feel strongly that government regulations must not hold back the return of Metis and Aboriginal peoples to means of livelihood from which we were historically displaced.

It is important to realize that we are suggesting that wildlife ranching is a contemporary manifestation of an Aboriginal right. For that reason and because it would take place on Aboriginals' lands, we recommend that Aboriginal people receive first priority access to wildlife ranching opportunities. We are not advocating any large scale or general policy to
allow private and/or crown land to be allocated for wildlife ranching. The Aboriginal people of Alberta relied on wildlife from their first days long before the Europeans settled in this province. Given the limited but real markets that are available for wildlife - particularly elk - and the right Aboriginal peoples have to continue their traditional cultural economy, we feel there are great advantages to providing legislative, regulatory and policy allowances for commercial wildlife ranching on Aboriginals' lands.

Many Metis Settlers are involved in employment opportunities that digress substantially from those of the "cultural economy". These are occupations that are associated with industries such as oil and gas exploration and exploitation. One primary advantage to an industry such as wildlife ranching is its renewable resource characteristics.

Because of this, well established and managed wildlife ranching operations are sources of livelihood that will enhance the lifestyle and well-being of the Metis for generations to come.

I would like now to address some of the current specific political issues that impact on Metis Settlement wildlife ranching.

As I have mentioned, the Metis Settlements were established and are administered under the Metis Betterment Act and Regulations which were passed in the Provincial Legislature in the late 1930's. At the present time, this legislation is in the process of being revised and the government has established, by order in council, a Joint Settlement/Government Committee to review the Act and Regulations. This is chaired by the Honourable Dr. Grant MacEwan, and its membership consists of John Thompson, M. L. A. & Chairman of the Cabinet/Caucus Committee on Native Affairs; Robin Ford, Assistant Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs; Randall Hardy, Chairman of Kikino Metis Settlement, and myself. This Committee has agreed to recommend that Settlement Councils shall allocate the use and occupation of land on the Settlement and shall have management authority over hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. The Joint Committee agreed that the principles should be implemented by efforts to have them recognized in legislation that is deemed appropriate.

The recommendations of the Joint Committee, and the other political process that the Federation is involved in, have the common aims of increased political self-determination and increased economic development for the Metis Settlements. We believe very strongly that the way of producing economic self-reliance is through increased political self-determination. Economic development should be pursued through a balanced approach between the Metis cultural economy and modern employment and business opportunities.

One piece of legislation that has been deemed appropriate in terms of recognizing Metis authority over Metis lands, and that is of issue in elk husbandry, is the Alberta Wildlife Act which is presently in the process of being revised and updated.

The Alberta Federation of Metis Settlement Associations has studied the government's discussion paper on proposed revisions to the Wildlife
Act which was issued in November, 1983, and the October, 1982, Alberta Energy and Natural Resources publication entitled "Fish and Wildlife Policy for Alberta".

We were pleased to note in the October, 1982 policy publication, a number of instances where the Alberta Metis Settlements were given specific consideration. Two cases are section 23 and 24 of the Wildlife Policy which say:

23) The Division will encourage an environment which fosters the development of a domestic wildlife farming industry on private land and Metis Settlements . . .

24) The Division will encourage an environment which fosters the development of a game ranching industry on private land and Metis Settlements . . .

Upon reviewing the more recent November, 1983 discussion paper, however, we noted that these particular items and others that pertained specifically to the Metis Settlements, were not included. We realize that not all of which is government policy may be included in legislation, but we do feel that the Alberta Metis Settlements represent a case where statutory inclusion is warranted. It is our belief that a new Wildlife Act should provide that fish and wildlife regulations on Metis Settlements are governed by principles similar to those of the (new) Metis Betterment Act and Regulations.