

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

BATHURST CARIBOU HERD MANAGEMENT PLAN

February 22, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: The Bathurst caribou herd has suffered a catastrophic decline over the last 30 years from 472,000 to as low as 16,000 animals today. The response from this government to date has largely been centred on restricting the harvest by non-Aboriginal people and more recently, on Aboriginal peoples who have agreed to not take any caribou from this herd.

The causes of the decline are not clear, but we do know that the herd is less resilient when numbers are low and any further cumulative impacts may push the herd beyond the point of no return. A recently released study by the Tlicho Research and Learning Institute found: "The establishment of large-scale mines and associated industrial activities on the Bathurst caribou migration route and feeding grounds as the main factor behind caribou health defects and changes to their behaviour and migration."

It also states: "In response, caribou have chosen to avoid centres of mining activities due to poor forage and noise and dust pollution. The activities of the resource extraction industry around the EK'atl (Lac de Gras) area, have established a 'wall' blocking the main caribou migration route."

This study also marks a remarkable convergence of traditional knowledge and western science. Data from collars and aerial surveys have established a zone of influence around the diamond mines where caribou calves and cows are less likely to be found.

I attended a cumulative effects workshop for the Slave Geological Province in 1993 following two mineral staking seasons where an area the size of France was taken up. There have been many, many workshops and meetings since then on cumulative effects on the Bathurst caribou herd, but there is still no management plan for the herd, no legally-binding land use plan for the Northwest Territories' portion of the range of the herd, and I am not aware of one square centimetre of land that has been permanently protected for the caribou in the Northwest Territories or Nunavut.

It is not just this MLA that is concerned about the state of the Bathurst caribou herd. The Mackenzie Valley Review Board said this in its February 1, 2016, report on the Jay Project:

"The lack of a management plan for the Bathurst Caribou herd during a period of very low numbers and a declining population is unacceptable to the Review Board... There is no evidence the GNWT is developing a herd recovery strategy.... The Review Board notes that the GNWT was required by section 12.11.2 of the Tlicho Agreement to prepare a comprehensive proposal for the management of the Bathurst caribou herd within three years of the effective date (2005) of that land claim.

That was 2005, Mr. Speaker. There is no evidence before the Review Board that this legal obligation has been satisfied.

"The GNWT needs to complete and implement an interim recovery and management plan for the Bathurst caribou herd before this herd's population is so reduced that recovery of the herd is no longer likely." That's the end of the quote. I will be tabling the Tlicho Research and Learning Institute Report I mentioned earlier, and I will have questions for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.