

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

CO-MANAGEMENT BOARD VACANCIES

June 2, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, [English translation not provided]. On February 23, 2016 I asked the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations a number of written questions about vacancies on NWT Co-Management Boards. Earlier this week, partial answers were tabled in this House. There were some shocking revelations.

Co-Management Boards are institutions of public government that carry out legislated duties related to land use planning, environmental assessment, land and water use, and wildlife management. These Boards are part of constitutionally protected land rights agreements that were negotiated among Aboriginal, federal, and territorial governments. These Boards play a crucial role in how we take care of our land, water, and wildlife, and work with communities to ensure we protect our environment. They ensure resource development does not take opportunities away from future generations.

While Aboriginal governments and GNWT generally nominate people to these Boards, most of the appointments are made by the federal government. Unfortunately, these appointments often take too long and have become politicized in some cases. The response I received reveals that two Boards are now in a position where there is no quorum and they cannot legally make decisions or carry out their important work. This includes the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board that is responsible for assessing larger projects and projects where public concern is an issue.

How can we have an effective integrated resource management system when Boards do not have the legal ability to make decisions? Of the 106 positions on the 14 Co-Management Boards in the Northwest Territories, 24 positions are vacant. Some of these positions have been unfilled for as long as five and a half years. How can a position on a Co-Management Board go unfilled for five and a half years? I was pleased to see that only 4 of the 24 positions are GNWT nominees and that names to fill those positions have been submitted to the federal government. This would seem to indicate that GNWT is not the problem, but are we part of the solution?

GNWT maintains a Public Board Appointments section on the Department of Executive website. This is a helpful resource, but it is really difficult to determine when positions actually open up on the boards. It would be much more helpful to have a function that shows which positions are open or ending soon and how long vacancies have been unfilled.

In February, I asked what the Minister is doing to get vacancies to the Co-Management Boards filled. This part of my questions did not get an answer and I will be pursuing that with the Minister later today. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.