

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 258-18(2): HABITAT PROTECTION FOR BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

June 17, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. I didn't give my colleague, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources any warning of this, but earlier this week, he tabled a response to oral questions where he gave notice about some caribou matters and I wanted to follow-up on some of that.

I wanted to ask the Minister, it appears to me that the burden of the management responses to the decline of the Bathurst caribou herd have fallen on resource harvesters. Can the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources tell us what concrete actions have been taken in terms of habitat protection on this side of the border? Habitat protection on this side of the border.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'd have to clarify the Member's question, if it's related to Boreal caribou or the Bathurst herd. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Yes, certainly, I'm talking about Bathurst caribou, specifically the Bathurst caribou herd and that's the herd that was the subject of the response that the Minister tabled in the house earlier this week. So that's what I'm asking is habitat protection on the NWT side of the border for the Bathurst caribou herd.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As many people may not be well aware, the Bathurst herd has a working group that is working on a complete range plan and a recovery strategy for the herd of Bathurst.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the answer from the Minister. So out of that working group and range planning exercise that's going on, can we actually expect that there's going to be proposals to withdraw lands, protect habitat on this side of the border when it comes to the Bathurst caribou herd because that hasn't happened so far to date and that the herd is in a bad situation. So are we going to see some specific land protection on this side of the border coming out of that process?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: It's early days for the working group on the Bathurst and other Boreal caribou and other things as such, so I suspect that those conversations will be taking place and we'll be bringing forward the commitments and ideas that these committees bring forward. But I cannot tell the Member as of yet if we have any plans set aside for this type of thing.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I appreciate the response from the Minister. I guess the reason why I'm pursuing this in the house today is that the Nunavut Impact Review Board announced its recommendation recently that the Sabina Gold Project should not go ahead on the Nunavut side of the border because of its potential impact on the Bathurst caribou herd and its calving grounds.

Now, the position of the Government of the Northwest Territories in that proceeding and that process was that we did not want to see any development in the calving grounds of the Bathurst caribou herd.

So if we're going to ask Nunavut to take action protecting habitat on their side of the border, what are we prepared to do on our side of the border with regard to protecting the Bathurst caribou herd, specifically habitat. Is there going to be some kind of land protection on this side of the border to help the herd? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: And the Member is right. We have taken a position on the calving grounds on the Nunavut side of the border, but that is where the calving grounds are. On the Northwest Territories side is the range areas of the herds and many herds. Like I've said, we're working with all the Aboriginal groups and stakeholders in this and across many departments and we'll be developing something coming forward in the plan for the Bathurst and I will be bringing this forward at some time to this Assembly.