

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

GNWT ACTION REGARDING DECLINING BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

June 23, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. The Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board released part A of its decision on the joint Tlicho Government and GNWT management proposal for the Bathurst caribou herd on May 26th of this year. This decision focused on the state of the herd, harvest restrictions in time for the 2016-17 season, and wolf control. Part B will come later this summer and will feature recommendations on biological and environment monitoring and cumulative effects.

Mr. Speaker, the board found that "despite all the management actions taken over the past seven years, the herd is still declining and recovery of the herd remains uncertain," and that "this is an issue of serious conservation concern." Furthermore, the board said, "With the Bathurst herd in such a perilous state, all peoples who harvest in Wek'eezhii must do their part to ensure the recovery of the herd. Users and managers must act now in whatever way is possible to protect the herd so future recovery may be possible."

What is our government doing to help with recovery of the Bathurst caribou herd? This government actively opposes resource development in the calving ground of the herd on the Nunavut side of the border. This was the GNWT position taken in the recent review of the Sabina Gold & Silver project by the Nunavut Impact Review Board. I commend our government for taking such action, but what are we doing on our side of the border?

While we have set up mobile caribou protection areas to restrict harvesting, there has been no such protection from disturbance caused by mining activities. Such measures were used in the 1980s in the Kivalliq region to help protect the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds from disturbance caused by mineral exploration. In addition, there has been no temporary or permanent protection of important caribou habitat on the GNWT side of the border. There are no thresholds for disturbance that have been established for the herd. No legally binding land use plans for Crown land exist for the herd's range on the NWT side of the border. Can we afford to wait for the Bathurst range planning exercise to be completed before our government finally starts to act to protect habitat?

I have raised the issue of who bears the burden of management responses in our efforts to save the Bathurst caribou herd. I will have questions for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources later today.