

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

2015 NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT AND PARTICIPANT FUNDING

June 29, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. It is time to mine the 2015 Environmental Audit for some issues to bring before this House. Members will recall that this audit is the legitimate, legally-mandated way to improve integrated resource management systems for the Mackenzie Valley as established in constitutionally entrenched agreements. Today, it is another one of my favourite topics, participant funding. Canadians south of 60 degrees are entitled to participant funding in federal environmental assessment processes. If you live north of 60, you are treated as a second-class citizen.

I appeared before a House of Commons committee in 1997 during its review of the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and raised the issue of participant funding that Canadians south of 60 were entitled to. But the message fell on deaf ears at that time. Almost 20 years later, the same issue has been raised in successive environmental audits. Participant funding has been offered only three times for large environmental assessments: the Mackenzie Gas Project, Giant Mine, and Snap Lake.

Here are a few nuggets from the 2015 Environmental Audit: "The MVRMA is based on a system of public participation and engagement. Participant funding is not steady or readily available. Participant funding was not addressed during the devolution process. Where the capacity does exist, Aboriginal groups and other participants indicated that simultaneous requests and regulated timelines and comment windows set by Boards impede their ability to provide meaningful input." That is the end of the quote, Mr. Speaker. The audit recommended that "Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and GNWT should assess public participation/consultation requirements and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada should make a long-term funding commitment, including stress funding, to Aboriginal governments and organizations and other participants in the MVRMA regulatory processes."

We seem to be at an impasse, as shown by the response to the audit. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada says participant funding will be considered on a case-by-case basis for future environmental assessments in the Northwest Territories. GNWT says that participant funding remains a federal responsibility.

If we want people to have confidence in resource management decisions, they have to have the capacity and resources to participate. I will have questions for the Minister of Lands on the issue of participant funding for Northwest Territories residents to get involved and have confidence in environmental assessments in the Northwest Territories. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.