

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITIES AND REMEDIATION PLAN FOR CON MINE AND SURROUNDING AREA

October 27, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. The Con headframe has been in the news lately as part of the closure and reclamation plan of that site. I've expressed concerns about the closure plan for the Con Mine for many years as a private citizen living nearby. This was a productive gold mine that made significant contributions to Yellowknife since 1938, but I'm seriously worried about the environmental legacy it will leave behind. Water treatment alone will likely be required for hundreds of years, as will inspections and maintenance of the tailings pond covers and other structures, and a hazardous waste site will be left at the mine.

This is a complex site that will eventually be surrounded by our expanding city. We need to get it right. GNWT has surface leases covering a large part of the mine site that require the area to be returned in a condition that is satisfactory, without spelling out precisely what that means. Will our government accept the land back if there are perpetual care requirements, including monitoring and maintenance? Who will pay these costs that may not happen for decades or hundreds of years into the future? How will we be judged by future generations if we do not take care of our land and water?

There are also some contaminated lands in the area that are not covered by the current surface leases at the Con Mine. The Negus Mine operated from 1939 to 1952 and was then purchased by the adjacent Con Mine. There is an extensive tailings pond that was associated with the Negus Mine that remains largely uncovered. Half of it is under the closure plan for the Con Mine and the remainder is owned by Imperial Oil Limited. Tailings continue to blow around the area and have elevated levels of arsenic. During the review of the Con Mine closure plan in 2014 and earlier, I raised the issue of who owns this land, what if any remediation requirements there may be, and when it would be remediated. The GNWT Department of Lands undertook to respond but never did. The Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board also wrote the Department of Lands on March 30, 2015, on this same issue, but there is no evidence of any response.

All of this speaks to our lack of policy, standards, regulations, and laws to properly ensure that mine sites are closed and remediated in a satisfactory way, and I have raised this issue many times in this House.

Saskatchewan has had an Institutional Control Program since 2005, where properly remediated sites are accepted back by the government with payments into two funds to cover monitoring and maintenance, and then unforeseen events. More than two and half years after devolution, we still do not have a proper closure and reclamation regime in place to prevent public liabilities for future generations. I will have questions for the Minister of Lands later today. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.