

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 427-18(2): IMPACTS OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN SLAVE GEOLOGICAL PROVINCE ON BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

October 14, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier. It appears that our departments work in completely isolated silos when it comes to caribou and roads. Will the Premier tell this House and the public why caribou are not considered in designing and developing roads into the Slave Geological Province? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Our Ministers work closely together. I'll redirect the question to the Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, caribou is not an afterthought with this Cabinet or people in the Northwest Territories. We are working closely with Transportation. Just to be clear, this is proposed corridor through the Slave Geological Province, and my understanding is that, if this project were to go ahead, they would go through an environmental assessment process that would talk about the possible effects to the caribou, and then we would take the necessary mitigation steps if we get to that stage in the project.

MR. O'REILLY: But the fact is there's no recovery strategy or plan for the Bathurst caribou herd. Not one square metre of critical habitat has been protected, and there are no caribou protection measures in place for land users. Will the Premier tell this House why Cabinet is pushing ahead with a plan for a road into the Slave Geological Province in range of the Bathurst caribou herd in the absence of a recovery strategy or plan for that herd, and at a time when the herd is in a desperate situation?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I share the Member's concern. I've seen the numbers from as far back as 1986, so I share his concern. With the proposed Slave Geological Province, there's a lot of work that needs to be done yet. We're not even sure if this project is going to go ahead. There's still the funding that we have to work with, and then the EA process that we need to go through. But in the meantime, we're continuing our work on the Bathurst caribou range plan. We're working with Aboriginal governments and all stakeholders, and we are putting a Bathurst caribou range plan together, and we're hoping to have this completed by March 2018.

MR. O'REILLY: So we may have a plan, then, for the Bathurst caribou in about a year and a half from now, but what is this government doing now other than imposing harvesting restrictions on people when it comes to the Bathurst caribou herd? I'd like to know how our government develops a route for a road into the range of the Bathurst caribou herd without any consideration for their habitat, its use, and the current desperate state of the herd.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I commend some of the Aboriginal governments out there on their desire to try and preserve the herd. To me, that shows a great deal of leadership because they recognize the desperate situation of this particular herd, and I share their concern. As far as the proposed route goes, there may be a couple of possibilities that the Department of Transportation is looking at for a proposed road. Again, it would need to go through an

environmental assessment process where they'd be able to hear concerns, especially from those that are quite concerned about the survival of the Bathurst caribou herd.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I'm still getting some mixed messages, I think, from the other side of the House in terms of which departments are working on this and so on. In the absence of a recovery plan and continued low numbers of caribou our government continues to push ahead with development that will have a significant adverse effect on the Bathurst caribou herd. At what point would Cabinet decide it is not in the best interest of caribou to pursue this road? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, as I said before we are working on a strategy, and as far as mixed messaging goes I think our Premier said it right when he said that all departments on this side are working together on a plan because we do recognize the seriousness of the Bathurst caribou herd and the effect it might have if there was a corridor that was built through there. I can assure the Member and all Members and the public, that the Government of the Northwest Territories is going to take all necessary steps to protect the Bathurst caribou herd, because to go from 476,000 animals in 1986 to just over 38,000 now that points out a problem and we need to try to find ways to mitigate that problem. I've even talked to my officials. I believe there was a caribou summit that was held in 2007 up in Inuvik, and I've even entertained the thought of having another caribou summit where we can hear from all people, including the public.