

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

**IMPACTS OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN SLAVE GEOLOGICAL PROVINCE
ON BATHURST CARIBOU HERD**

October 31, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. I made statements on the perilous state of the Bathurst caribou herd in February and June in this House. Last week, the Minister of Transportation announced progress on plans for an access road into the Slave Geological Province, including a road "that will provide the greatest economic benefit to the region and the Northwest Territories." While some may be happy, this is not good news for caribou.

When asked about how environmental concerns would be dealt with, the response was that those issues would be dealt with through an environmental assessment. Caribou are an afterthought for Cabinet and not considered in designing or proposing roads or for their importance to the economy and culture of Indigenous peoples. I would just like to remind the other side of the House that the Bathurst caribou herd has suffered a catastrophic decline over the last 30 years, from 472,000 to as low as 16,000 animals today.

The Tlicho Research and Learning Institute found "the establishment of large-scale mines and associated industrial activities on the Bathurst caribou habitat is the main factor behind caribou health defects and changes to their behaviour and migration." The Mackenzie Valley Review Board said in February, "The GNWT needs to complete and implement an interim recovery and management plan for the Bathurst caribou herd before this herd's population is so reduced that the recovery of the herd is no longer likely." The Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board found that "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 ways possible to protect the herd so future recovery may be possible."

It's not clear how Cabinet sets priorities among a number of competing road proposals, but, apparently, caribou receive very little, if any, consideration. If we were to listen to the sound advice of the co-management bodies, we should be doing much more when it comes to saving the Bathurst caribou herd. Developing road corridors without considering caribou is not responsible development. Leaving this task to the same bodies that have already told us we are not doing enough is hardly an answer, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Premier later today. Mahsi.