

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

STATUS OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATER AGREEMENTS

February 20, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. The GNWT has negotiated a number of transboundary water agreements with the following jurisdictions:

- Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Yukon, and Canada for the Mackenzie River Basin Master Agreement in 1997;
- the Yukon in 2002;
- Alberta in 2015; and
- British Columbia in 2015.

These are very important agreements for the health of our aquatic life and communities on our shared watersheds, which includes the vast majority of our population. These arrangements also help fulfil commitments made in Indigenous land rights agreements where right is established to ensure waters which are on or flow through or are adjacent to Indigenous lands remain substantially unaltered as to quality, quantity, and rate of flow.

Our government has invested a substantial amount of time and money in the negotiation of these agreements, and Cabinet says this continues in the proposed budget of 2017-18 with an allocation of \$2.1 million. While this may seem like a large amount it is a small price for pure and drinkable water at a time when our planet's fresh water supply is shrinking and in danger.

While our government made good progress on these agreements in 2015, I can find little evidence of further work. There are no annual reports as required under the agreements on the Environment and Natural Resources website. The agreements are found there, and some background information, but very little on implementation. There are a couple of baseline reports on groundwater in the Mackenzie Valley and water quality in the Hay River watershed, but nothing else. What is the status of negotiations with the Yukon, Saskatchewan, and Nunavut? Have water quality objectives and learning plans been started under any of the agreements? Are the bilateral management committees actually set up and meeting?

These transboundary water agreements were of such importance that Cabinet included them in our mandate. If we are truly to live up to these agreements, and nothing is more important than water, we need to better communicate what is going on with the public and MLAs on these transboundary agreements and fully implement them. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.