

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

PROTECTION OF THE BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

March 1, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. I have raised the plight of the Bathurst caribou herd in this House since the beginning of our term, probably almost as many times as the Minister of Transportation has talked about the Yellowknife airport. To date, the responses from Cabinet have been non-committal at best. Ministers say work is being done to create a management plan while plowing ahead with plans for an all-weather road into the heart of the herd's remaining critical habitat, including its calving grounds. The only concrete actions by our government to date have been harvester restrictions. Not one square centimetre of habitat has been permanently protected in any way by our government

I will commend the Department of Environment and Natural Resources for leading the Bathurst Caribou Herd Range Plan exercise that started in the fall of 2014. Even if it is years late and follows several damning findings and recommendations from environmental management boards, it is the only thing going in terms of a process to bring all the parties together to look at the future. A discussion paper and plain language summary were prepared in December 2016 and public consultations are to begin soon as announced by the Minister on February 8th in this House.

I have reviewed the discussion paper and it presents a sound path forward with the following:

- Maintain human disturbance below threshold levels;
- Maintain connectivity between seasonal ranges;
- Maintain the integrity of sensitive habitats; and
- Manage human access.

To properly manage human activities and protect the Bathurst caribou herd, it will be necessary to implement cumulative effects disturbance frameworks, protect areas important to caribou, guide land use, and control access. The discussion paper suggests that we assemble guidance on practices related to caribou-friendly road construction techniques and consider winter-only access in the calving and post-calving and summer ranges of the Bathurst caribou herd.

The herd is in desperate condition with extreme limits on harvesting. It's incomprehensible that our government continues to plan for an all-weather corridor that would link up with a similar road on the Nunavut side of the boundary that would bisect the calving grounds and post-calving critical habitat. The discussion paper on range plan presents models for future development where people will have to make a choice between caribou or mines. What choice will our government make?

I will have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.
Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.