ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 664-18(2): PROTECTION OF THE BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

March 1, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. It seems to be environment and climate change day in the House, and I love it.

---Laughter

My question is for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. The recently released Bathurst Range Plan discussion paper recommends winter-only access in calving and post-calving and summer ranges of the Bathurst caribou herd. Does the Minister accept this recommended next step and that there are trade-offs to be made between caribou protection and mineral development? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we recognize what they're trying to say and there is a correlation between that and some potential development down the road, and we will continue to work on how we can mitigate and find a balance between the two. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for his response. We know that the proposed Grays Bay port and road project, which is on the Nunavut side of the boundary, includes an all-weather road that passes through the calving and post-calving grounds of the Bathurst caribou herd. Is it still the position of our government to oppose development in the calving grounds of caribou herds and will he commit to communicate that position to the Government of Nunavut?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, our commitment is to work with the Government of Nunavut on the questions of shared caribou concern. I have already had a preliminary discussion with my counterpart in Nunavut and we will continue to relay our concerns to the Government of Nunavut and work with them in trying to find a balanced approach.

MR. O'REILLY: I thank the Minister for that response and look forward to seeing some of the correspondence that he might have with the Government of Nunavut. Can the Minister explain why our government continues to pursue funding for an all-weather road into the Slave Geological Province before the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan is completed and implemented? It's sort of like putting the cart before the horse.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I take the Member's point. As far as the road, I mean, it's still, very, very early in the discussion stage. We may not see a road for a number of years. If we see a road at all, again, that's contingent on the federal government and the funding that they might have and then as well as funding from the Northwest Territories government once we get through our budget process and we have the resources to commit these types of projects.

So I can assure the Member that we will continue to do our part to ensure that there is a balance, but we do like to see economic development but not at all costs, and I can assure the Member we will continue to have that position.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to get that commitment from the Minister. Sorry, I mixed up my analogies a little bit earlier. I should have talked about trucks before the caribou. Clearly, the routing for the Slave Geological Province road was chosen by our government without any regard for caribou, as stated by the Minister of Transportation at least a couple of times in the House. How will Cabinet decide whether such a road can be safely built without causing irreparable harm to the Bathurst caribou herd, or has that decision already been made? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that no decision has been made on the route yet. I think it was just a preliminary discussion. I can assure the Member that it is not development at all costs. We will have a position, and we will continue to put our position forward, ENR, to the appropriate decision-makers. Cabinet actually does not decide on the route. We would work with the decision-makers and make our concerns known on the calving grounds as well as any other effects it might have on the environment.