

## ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

### QUESTION 669-18(2)/676-18(2): DIAMOND MINE ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

March 1, 2017

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, monsieur le President. As I discussed in my Member's statement, diamond mine environmental agreements are an important part of the network of arrangements that form the social licence for the diamond mines to operate and to maintain public confidence. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Can the Minister summarize the thinking and action that has taken place on amending the diamond mine environmental agreements? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, after devolution, the Government of the Northwest Territories assumed the responsibilities of the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, or INAC, as outlined in the environment agreements for the territory's three diamonds. However, the environmental agreements have not been formally amended to reflect this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks to the Minister for that response, because it leads perfect into my next question. There are still residual federal responsibilities in the Northwest Territories for fish, toxic substances, migratory wildlife, transboundary issues, and then the value, of course, that the federal government can bring to the table in terms of experience and funding. Does the Minister recognize these roles of the federal government, and will they be adequately reflected to any amendments to the diamond mine environmental agreements?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** The Government of Canada and the GNWT actually drafted an addendum and release agreements to reflect the transfer of responsibility from Canada to the GNWT. These agreements were not signed prior to devolution because the Aboriginal parties did not support having Canada removed as a signatory to the environmental agreements.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I thank the Minister again that he recognizes that there was opposition to the sorts of changes that were being proposed by our government on the environmental agreements in the past. So can the Minister explain how his department intends to meaningfully consult with Indigenous governments and the public regarding any amendments to the diamond mine environmental agreements?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Mr. Speaker, the decision was actually not made by our government. We were prepared to sign an agreement with Canada; however, because of the concerns of the Aboriginal governments the agreement was not signed.

In December of 2016, there was a joint letter that was sent to the environmental agreement signatories and parties to inform them that the GNWT and INAC recommended that Canada remain a signatory to these agreements but with limited responsibilities.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the Minister for that response, but I can assure him I was in the room in my previous life when the changes were being proposed. We couldn't even get the federal government into the room, and it was actually being led by the territorial government, these changes last time around. I'm pleased to hear the Minister say in this House that he recognizes that there's ongoing role for the federal government in these agreements. So can the Minister commit to engaging the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment regarding changes to the Diamond Mine Environmental Agreements? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Mr. Speaker, that was the one unanswered question and the answer would be, yes, that I would continue to update and upgrade the Regular Members as we move forward with the discussions we're having with Canada and the Aboriginal governments.

**QUESTION 676-18(2):  
DIAMOND MINE ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just pursue this issue of changes to the diamond mine environmental agreements a little bit further with the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Earlier, I said that I can assure the Minister that the initiative to change the agreements last time to remove the federal government from the agreements was actually coming from our government, GNWT. I am pleased to hear him say that is not the case now, that there were some letters sent in September of 2016 about changes. Can the Minister table some sample letters in this House just so we have a better sense of what is going on? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I will find out if I am able to do that, or if I do find the letters, I will share them with the Members, and if possible, I can table them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.