

## MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

### NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AGRICULTURE STRATEGY

March 9, 2017

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment released the first-ever NWT Agricultural Strategy. This in itself is a very good thing and has the potential to help build food security and diversify our economy.

I offer some observations and recommendations having reviewed the document. I had hoped to see a more substantive effort on presenting the history of agriculture and its contribution to the NWT economy. There is nothing I could find about traditional harvesting of berries or medicines, on the missionary farms, or the experimental farm that was located in Fort Simpson. I was surprised at the lack of analysis of soils, weather, and climate change. All of that would have been helpful to identify potential areas for future agricultural land use.

The focus of the document is largely on food production and agriculture as a business rather than food security. In fact, the only occurrence of the phrase "food security" are in the Minister's message and in the glossary. Perhaps, there is still a chance to broaden the focus of our efforts or at least identify a range of actions to meet the needs of the commercial sector, community-level agriculture, and household food security. For example, there is no mention of community food security plans or inter-settlement trade.

There is a lot of discussion of identifying legislation, regulations, and policies related to their implications for agriculture. I would have thought we could have done that work as part of the strategy itself and begin to identify priority areas for improvements and updating.

It is good to see that access to more land for agricultural purposes has been identified as an issue, but the discussion is at a rather high level with few solutions offered. There is nothing I could find in the strategy about research and development into northern agricultural techniques and technology or circumpolar cooperation or partnerships.

Perhaps the biggest issue with the strategy is the lack of any specific targets or goals, or actual resources to carry out any of this work. I had hoped to see something like "increase the value of agricultural production by 50 per cent in five years" or "complete food security plans for all communities in the NWT within five years" or something similar. Most importantly, no costs have been estimated in the action plan for any of the activities and, of course, no new funds are identified in the 2017-18 budget. How will this work be carried out if we are not going to devote any funds for it, and there are no estimates even if we wanted to attract potential partners?

I will have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.