

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Conservation Planning
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources—March 1, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm looking at page 63, and there's a reduction in conservation planning from 2016-17 to 2017-18. It's around \$105,000. Can the Minister explain the reduction here? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O' Reilly. Dr. Kelly.

DR. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What appears to be a reduction is that in 2015-16, we did the engagement for Thaidene Nene, which was included in the costs that you see there in the actuals and there's been a reduction in the position. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Dr. Kelly. Mr. O' Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I can see the reduction as we go down to page 65. There are actually two people being cut, or two positions, I should say, being cut from this function within ENR. Can someone explain what these two positions are and why it's necessary to cut them? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O' Reilly. Dr. Kelly.

DR. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The conservation area's advisor, there are several in the department, and we feel we can do the work. Others can take on the duties that this position was doing and it was vacant at the time. The second position is an environmental assessment analyst, and the same is true. There are other environmental assessment analysts in the department. With devolution, Lands has become the lead for coordinating environmental assessment, so we feel we can make do without these positions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Dr. Kelly. Mr. O' Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think it's probably fair for me to say that the Protected Areas Strategy, or what was known as the Protected Areas Strategy, has languished somewhat over the last couple of years. I understood that there was a renewed push to try to complete this network of protected areas. It's in the mandate for the 18th Assembly and I know that the Minister -- it might have been the previous Minister -- made announcements about renewed effort to try to get this moving again and so on. I know the position was vacant, but how can we, you know, say on one hand we're interested in trying to reinvigorate this effort while we're cutting a position? It just doesn't make any sense. So I probably need to hear from the Minister on this one rather than the staff people. I would appreciate a response. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O' Reilly. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Member's desire to hear from the Minister directly himself. We have a five-year action plan that we're

working on right now. As we go forward and we find that some of the work that we have to do in future years are within the next budget cycle, I mean, there's an opportunity to expand on that work, then I suppose we would have to go back and look at bringing the necessary expertise on board. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O' Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just would like to ask a few more questions about the staffing levels within ENR then when it comes to this conservation network initiative. How many other people are working on this initiative within the department? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: We believe there might be five others, but we would have to confirm that and share that with the Member. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think this is another example where the fiscal strategy is driving the bus here again, and we are developing an action plan, yet we're cutting staff while we are doing that, or at least maybe the position is vacant, but we are cutting positions while we are developing the policy and the framework to do it. We have seen this whether it is Aurora College or whatever. It is just a repeating pattern within the government where we are cutting positions for a fiscal strategy before we have the policy work, the action plan to actually get the work done.

Can the Minister convince me that this is not one of these examples and that we are still going to be able to have a five-year action plan and deliver on this by the end of the mandate by cutting this position now? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I don't think the reductions are driving this budget. The department feels that they have produced a five-year action plan entitled "Healthy Land, Healthy People, Government of the Northwest Territories Priorities for Advancement of Conservation Network Planning." Our position is that we feel we have the necessary capacity within our existing department or existing people to complete the work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the response from the Minister, but I will continue to disagree that we have the capacity to deliver, but time will tell, and I will look forward to the progress on this initiative, and I will continue to monitor it as it moves forward. Thanks, Mr. Chair. That's all I've got.