

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

### QUESTION 792-18(2): ARSENIC TESTING AROUND YELLOWKNIFE

May 30, 2017

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. Yesterday, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources made a statement about arsenic monitoring in the Yellowknife area and how our government would improve coordination of its responses. This is good news and is a helpful response to concerns I raised earlier in this sitting. While it is good to hear that ENR staff have begun monitoring Kam Lake and Grace Lake, look around. Yellowknife is surrounded by small lakes. What plans does his department have for a systematic approach to sampling most if not all the lakes around Yellowknife, and would this include speciation to detect more harmful forms of arsenic? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said the other day, we have been conducting some sampling in Great Slave and the Yellowknife River, and we have also sampled some of the lakes. I mentioned Kam Lake, Grace Lake. We plan on sampling them again this summer. ENR, what we are doing is we are compiling some water quality information from water bodies in the Yellowknife area because there are a number of other governments, industry, and academics who have collected water samples, so what we are doing is we are working with them to compile all that information. If there are some lakes there that need to be sampled, then we can look at that, but I think step number one is to see what information we have from all the lakes and all the studies that have been going around the capital, and put that information together, and then decide on our next steps from there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you to the Minister for that response. I agree that a good first step is to compile what is out there. I am hoping that, in compiling that, we also look at speciation or the different forms of arsenic. Some are toxic and some are far less toxic. Sampling water in lakes is a good start, but we also need to think about sampling of sediments, soils, and fish. Does the Minister have any plans for a systematic sampling of sediments, soils, and fish around Yellowknife for arsenic in its various forms?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** The quick answer is “yes,” and I will explain. We are collaborating with the University of Alberta to study metals in large-bodied fish, including arsenic, from several high use and potentially impacted lakes in and around the Yellowknife area. We have taken some sampling in March of 2016 on Kam, Grace, Long, and Upper Martin Lakes, and it will occur during 2017 at Walsh and Banting Lakes.

Existing sediment, soil, and fish data is also being compiled in the Yellowknife area. There are many entities, as the Member mentioned. Like the other governments, industries, and academics who have collected this type of information, again, we will work with those entities to compile a list of all the lakes that have been studied. If there are some that still need to be looked at, we can look at undertaking that.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you again to the Minister. It sounds like all of this information is going to get pulled together, and that is a good start. Of course, we have to also think about how this information is going to be shared with the public. Will the results on any health implications be simply posted on a website somewhere? What is the plan to make this information available to the public?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** As our information sharing protocol has improved, the reports and all information collected by ENR, we will share them with Health and Social Services after some analysis and review. Data collected by ENR will be posted on our website, and as mentioned, reports will be prepared and made public, as well.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. Thank you again to the Minister. As people know, I attended the Giant Mine Oversight Board's public meeting on May 16. One of the concerns raised was how information on water and soil arsenic contamination and any health-related or exposure warnings can be shared with tourists and visitors. We could do this through the Northern Frontier Visitors Centre -- oops, we don't have that anymore. How does the Minister intend to share arsenic contamination information with tourists and visitors? Merci, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our information reports will be publicly available on our website. Any updates to the precautionary public health advisory will be made publicly by Health and Social Services. The Office of the Chief Public Health Officer is examining the recent data for Kam and Grace Lakes, and will be updating the map to reflect more recent data on these lakes. The office of the Chief Public Health Officer is able to provide advice to agencies and community governments on possible messaging for residents and visitors.

For example, ITI worked with the office of the Chief Public Health Officer to develop signs for trail visitors along the Prospector Trail, which is a trail within the territorial park that is adjacent to Giant Mine. We are still continuing to have discussions with Canada regarding paths forward for an approach to legacy arsenic in the Yellowknife area, and information sharing with residents and visitors will be an element of these discussions.