

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 201-18(3): BATHURST CARIBOU RANGE PLAN

MARCH 6, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. In October 2016, the then-Minister of Transportation said in this House that environmental considerations, more specifically, potential impacts on the Bathurst caribou herd, played no part in the current alignment of the proposed Slave Geological Province Road.

Can the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources tell us whether his staff have had any discussions with the Department of Infrastructure about the routing of the proposed Slave Geological Province all-weather road and what the outcome of those discussions has been? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ENR staff have provided the Department of Infrastructure with wildlife data to support the development of road-routing options, and, based on preliminary discussions, I understand that the focus at this stage is in obtaining funding to advance the Slave Geological Province. Once we do that, there is still a very lengthy environmental assessment process that we would have to go through, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that, and I just sort of wonder when environmental considerations will go into the planning of the road.

In December 2016, there was an interim discussion document for the Bathurst caribou range plan, and it recommended winter road access over all-weather roads wherever possible, to reduce impacts. The draft range plan that is now out for public engagement is a lot weaker. It says the following: "New roads in the Bathurst caribou range take into consideration the needs of multiple purposes and users, seasonality of construction and use, routing, and design to minimize impacts to caribou." That is the end of the quote, Mr. Speaker. It is a lot weaker.

Can the Minister explain why the draft range plan was significantly weakened with regard to how all-weather roads would be acceptable?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: The wording on the draft range plan was modified to reflect recent input received during the last round of engagement, and I think the Member pointed out before that we do have a second phase of public decision-making engagement going on from January to the end of March, as well.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Minister for that. I looked at the What We Heard report, and there were no comments from any government agencies about this particular weakening of the report around roads, so I'm not sure where that came from.

Can the Minister tell us whether any resources have been dedicated in the 2018-2019 Environment and Natural Resources budget towards concrete actions and

implementation of the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is currently conducting a certain engagement on the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan which had been funded internally in our budget and funding received from Polar Knowledge Canada. ENR plans on returning to Cabinet in the summer of 2018 for approval on a final range plan and funding needs for the implementation of the range planning dependent on the final content of the plan. ENR and GNWT will need to identify funding for implementation of the plan at that time, which will likely involve existing program funding and request for new internal and external, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I'd like to thank the Minister again for that. I look forward for the supplementary appropriation for the plan.

As I said in my statement earlier today, if our government will not sign off on the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan and claims that it is advisory, not binding and not government policy, just what is the status of this plan and what confidence can the public have that our government is ever going to do anything to protect the Bathurst Caribou herd? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I mean I can inform the public that this government will do all we can to protect the Bathurst Caribou. We know that the numbers have been down drastically over the last number of years. Hence, the reason for trying to put a good range plan together. It will be a Cabinet-approved document and, as such, the GNWT will be responsible for implementing those recommendations following under its authority again. Once we have all the information compiled and we're ready to go out and go get a final approval of the range plan, we will obviously sit down with committee and seek some input from committee, if that's the wish of committee, and we will come up with a good range plan that will work for the preservation of the Bathurst Caribou herd. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.