

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 224-18(3): SITE C HYDROELECTRIC DAM PROJECT

MARCH 8, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier as the Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs. There is major concern with the impacts of Site C dam project, now proceeding on the Peace River in British Columbia. UNESCO, Amnesty International, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, they have all opposed this project. Yesterday in this House I tabled a letter that was signed by 14 downstream Indigenous governments, including four from the Northwest Territories, calling on the British Columbia government to cancel the project. I would like to know from the Premier whether our government has ever told the British Columbia government it is opposed to the project and, if not, why not? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. The Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of the Northwest Territories fully participated in the environmental assessment process associated with the proposed Site C hydroelectric project. In submissions to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, better known as CEAA, the Government of the Northwest Territories provided technical comments and concerns about potential downstream impacts from the Site C dam. The Government of the Northwest Territories also provided recommendations to address potential downstream effects to aquatic ecosystems, traditional harvesters, and communities in the Northwest Territories, specifically that the cumulative-effect assessment should expand in scope to include the Slave River and Slave River delta and should include assessment of the combined effects of Site C, Dunvegan, and Bennett Dam on water quality, quantity, and the health of the aquatic ecosystem.

Despite the input provided by the Government of the Northwest Territories and some Northwest Territories Indigenous governments, CEAA's decision concluded that the project could go ahead but provided 80 conditions to reduce the potential downstream effects. CEAA also concluded that no effects from the Site C dam are likely to occur in the Northwest Territories.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Premier for that level of detail in his response, but, after the CEAA panel was held, the British Columbia government, the Premier, announced that they were reconsidering the project. So, during that reconsideration, did our government write to the Premier of British Columbia at any time and oppose the project? Can the Premier tell me that?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: In the Mackenzie River basin, every province and territory is responsible for water management within their own jurisdictions. Transboundary agreements are bilateral in nature and, as such, address waters that flow between two jurisdictions. The waters of the Peace River flow directly between British Columbia and

Alberta.

The Northwest Territories-Alberta Bilateral Water Management Agreement deals directly with waters that flow between Alberta and the Northwest Territories, such as the Slave River. This is the approach defined in the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Master Agreement. As Alberta has made commitments related to water quality and overall ecosystem integrity in the Northwest Territories-Alberta Bilateral Agreement, they must ensure those commitments can be kept as they continue to negotiate with British Columbia towards their Alberta-British Columbia Bilateral Water Management Agreement.

The Northwest Territories-British Columbia Bilateral Water Management Agreement covers our directly shared waters with British Columbia within the Liard River Basin. British Columbia and the Yukon have recently signed a bilateral water management agreement related to their shared waters in the Liard Basin.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Premier for that response, but I want to give him a heads up: I have gone off-script. This was not a question that I gave to him ahead of time, but it is in response to the first question that I asked.

Once again, at the conclusion of CEAA panel review, after that was completed, the Premier of British Columbia announced that their new government was going to reconsider whether they should proceed with Site C. There was a process there where they were going to look at whether they should proceed or not. During that time, did our government write to the Government of British Columbia and oppose the Site C project at any point?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: After the three-year environmental assessment that was approved in 2014, construction of Site C began in 2015. The estimated completion date for Site C is 2024, and as the project had already received approval, we had already submitted our comments, and we did not write to the British Columbia Premier or the British Columbia government.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I would like to thank the Premier for that. I wish we had written.

The Northwest Territories is a member of the Mackenzie River Basin Board, which provides a forum for discussion of basin level issues at a multi-jurisdictional level, but the board has no teeth, and it can only make recommendations. It doesn't seem to really have any control over upstream actions of jurisdictions once removed. Does the Premier believe that we need to push for a basin-wide regime or agreement to deal with projects like Site C? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: I believe we already have such an agreement, the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement, in which negotiations began in 1960, was signed in 1997, and commits the Governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Yukon, and Canada, and now includes Nunavut, towards cooperatively managing the water and aquatic ecosystems of the entire Mackenzie

River Basin.

This agreement makes provisions for the parties to negotiate bilateral water management agreements to waters that are shared directly between two jurisdictions, and as per the master agreement, the Northwest Territories signed transboundary water management agreements with the Yukon in 2002, and with both Alberta and BC in 2015, and that process also includes dispute resolution processes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.