

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 347-18(3): ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

MAY 31, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur the President. My questions are for the Deputy Premier. I would like to follow up on the motion passed unanimously in this House on October the 20, 2017, calling on our government to take action to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Porcupine caribou herd. That motion directed the Premier to write the Prime Minister of Canada on these matters. I'm wondering whether that letter was sent, whether there was a reply, and can he give that correspondence to us and table it in the House? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Deputy Premier.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the letter was sent as a result of that motion. The letter was sent on December the 19th to the Prime Minister from our Premier. I'm not sure of the response, yet. I will follow up on that, and, at the appropriate time, I'm confident that the Premier will table those letters.

MR. O'REILLY: I'd like to thank the Deputy Premier for that, and, if he could provide the correspondence in advance of tabling, that would be really helpful. On April 20th, the United States Bureau of Land Management opened a public comment period on oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and the deadline is June 19th for that. So can the Deputy Premier tell us whether GNWT will be making a written submission to the Bureau of Land Management on this matter and what that submission might look like?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are currently preparing a technical submission to the environmental impact statement scoping process, which I will submit as Minister of ENR before the deadline of June 19th. I'm not exactly sure the contents of the technical submission, but I can follow up on that.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Deputy Premier again for that. I would like to encourage him to publicly release that submission here in the Northwest Territories.

The October 2017 motion on protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge called on our government to support and assist Gwich'in and other governments in their efforts. Can the Deputy Premier describe what efforts GNWT has made to support and assist other governments protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is, of course, the calving grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: GNWT has been one of the parties to the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement. We have been working very closely with our counterparts in the Yukon and the Gwich'in. The Yukon actually hosted a Porcupine caribou summit of the parties on January 31, 2018. As Minister of ENR, I hosted a follow-up to the Porcupine caribou summit in Inuvik on April 6th and 7th, and based on these meetings, a technical workshop was held in Whitehorse in May to coordinate a

science assessment of the potential impacts of development on the Porcupine caribou calving grounds. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Deputy Premier for that response. It sounds like our government is actually following through on that, and that is a great thing.

While we are on the subject of protecting caribou calving grounds, does our government actually have a policy position on resource development in other caribou calving grounds, and what are we doing to protect them?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I was waiting for that. I was waiting for that. Well, this is a herd that is extremely important to the people in the Western Arctic and in the Yukon and Alaska. When we do our work on some of our own projects, all of the best science will go into it. We will obviously take the preservation of any species into consideration. The issue that we are faced with here with the Porcupine caribou herd is that we are dealing with an administration in Washington. That will open up to the wild west without much thought given to the preservation of the caribou herd.

This is a very passionate issue for the people of the Western Arctic, in the Yukon, and in Alberta. For a lot of these people, it is a hill that they will die on. It is something that is very important to them. As far as our policy, we will do all of our scientific work when we have projects, and some of that work that we do will go into the decision-making process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.