

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 511-18(3): CONSULTATIONS ON BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

February 6, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources on the crisis of the Bathurst caribou herd.

I want to again thank the Minister for taking me along on the community visits. I thought that the community visits were a very good idea. I just wish that they had happened before the submission with the joint proposal, the management proposals for the two herds. I would like the Minister to explain why there was no consultation on the joint management proposals, before they were submitted, with the Tlicho communities, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, and even the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was glad that the Member was able to attend these sessions with me, and as I said in the sessions, I thought that it was very important that Regular Members come and listen to some of the concerns that the communities have firsthand. Again, I appreciate the Member taking the time to visit the communities with us, and also the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh on our trip out to Detah. They had an opportunity to hear firsthand some of the concerns that the community was sharing.

We had a lot of community membership show up, we met with the community leaders, and my understanding is that we were taking a lot of this information, and then we had representatives there from the Wek'eezhii Land and Resource Board, as well. My understanding was that we were going to make these rounds and then make our submission. If that wasn't the case, I will confirm that, and I will follow up on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. I can give him my assurance that those joint management proposals were sent in, in some cases, before we met with the communities. They were good meetings. I just wish that they had happened sooner, and I understand there is some urgency with this issue.

I have looked at these joint management proposals, and there doesn't seem to be any specific measures or actions related to habitat protection. There are just some further measures or restrictions on harvesting. I wonder: can the Minister explain why the joint management proposal for the Bathurst caribou herd does not contain any specific measures or actions for habitat protection, things like mobile caribou conservation measures, offsetting and compensatory mitigation, or even land use planning?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: The Bathurst joint management proposal includes a clear recommendation that the collaboratively developed Bathurst Caribou Range Plan be finalized and implemented, and work to develop the plan was initiated by ENR in 2013.

The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan includes the measures you have mentioned, including the mobile conservation measures, offsetting and participation in environmental assessment, and land use planning throughout the herd's range in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that. Yes, the joint management proposal does reference the range planning exercise and the plan itself, but it doesn't actually contain any of the measures from the plan. The problem seems to be with the plan itself. The plan, which I think is a good one, contains specific recommendations for community guardianship, habitat conservation, mobile caribou conservation measures, road planning and management, and so on, but the problem is that that plan doesn't seem to carry much weight yet.

Can the Minister explain what the status of the range plan is and why almost none of it was incorporated into the joint management proposal?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I will follow up on the status of the range plan. I will share it with this House, or I will share it with the Member.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Thanks to the Minister for that commitment. I look forward to an update on the range plan, and if I don't hear back before the end of the sitting, I might ask again, but maybe the Minister won't ever want to drive with me anywhere again.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, lastly, there doesn't seem to be any new funds identified for the caribou crisis in the budget address earlier today. Can the Minister tell me whether there is any new funding for caribou in the 2019-2020 budget? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: The GNWT has committed considerable resources to the management of barren-ground caribou, and as the Member heard in our presentations to the communities that we visited, there are a number of other initiatives that we are working on. I have directed the department to put the plan together to come up with identifying the resources, the amount of resources, that we might need to implement some of these. One of them I think was expanding the Boots on the Ground program. I think there was the predator initiative that we are working on. So I have directed the Department of ENR to identify the places where we could get the funding and the amount of money that we might need so that we can implement these initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.