

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

**QUESTION 832-18(3): BATHURST CARIBOU CRISIS**

**August 19, 2019**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources on the crisis of the Bathurst caribou herd. In the last sitting in June I asked the Minister about a trip that he took to Kugluktuk to meet with Nunavut officials. He has since provided a copy of the agenda for that meeting. Can the Minister provide an update of any further discussions with the Government of Nunavut to protect the Bathurst caribou herd? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always appreciate the Member's questions on the caribou, because it gives us an opportunity to speak of our dedication to the preservation of the caribou across the Northwest Territories, because they are very important to our existence. We have to do what we can to protect them.

Having said that, I did say that we met with the Nunavut Minister. I appreciate their dedication to the preservation of the caribou herds across the north, because they are very important to their people as well. We did ask our officials to initiate some technical discussions on the proposed content for a new memorandum of understanding, and the updated memorandum of understanding will build on the existing MOU, cooperation on managing shared population of caribou, signed by our two governments in February of 2017. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I would like to thank the Minister for that good information. It is great to hear that we may finally get an updated memorandum of understanding. Can the Minister tell us whether this agreement will provide for any temporary and/or permanent protection of habitat?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** We did task our officials to come up with some technical information, and we have a very close relationship with the Government of Nunavut. The 2017 MOU helped to formalize and support our longstanding relationship. The new MOU will focus on several key areas, including research and monitoring, data sharing, harvest management, predators, habitat, and co-management. We will continue to work with our partners over in Nunavut on the proposed MOU with the goal to complete this by the upcoming fall of this year, actually. We will be informed by ongoing discussions with our co-management partners in both jurisdictions.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that information. I don't think that I heard the words "habitat protection," though. I mentioned in my statement that Cabinet is still sitting on the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan. Can the Minister provide an update as to when Cabinet will approve this plan and announce that publicly?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** My apologies; I did say "habitat," and I would assume that "habitat protection" would also be part of that discussion, as well.

We are committed to implementing the new Bathurst Caribou Range Plan, now that it has been approved by Cabinet. The range plan was developed collaboratively with 21 organizations, including Indigenous governments, industry, environmental groups, renewable resource boards, and the federal government.

Again, I have to give a shout-out to Ottawa Aboriginal partners who understand that the preservation of the caribou herd is very important to people across the Northwest Territories, and they are doing their part. Shout-out to them for the good work and leadership that they are showing.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that great news. I had no idea, nor did the public know, that the Cabinet had actually approved the Bathurst caribou range plan. I know there are a lot of people and the remaining 8,000 Bathurst caribou are happy about that. Of course, there is always money for roads, including \$10 million more for the GNWT contribution for the Slave Geological Province Road. It will likely come forward as the first supplementary appropriation for the 19<sup>th</sup> Assembly. Can the Minister tell this House: when will money actually start to flow for work to implement the Bathurst caribou range plan? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** The Member makes a good point. There is always money for infrastructure projects that creates employment across the Northwest Territories. It is what the people of the Northwest Territories have told us is one of their priorities, is to work. The range plan will serve as a document to guide the GNWT.

The Member's question about the funding: we have identified some funding as we went through our business plans. We have worked with Ottawa, trying to secure some funding. We have actually doubled our efforts in some of the initiatives that have been brought forward by the Aboriginal governments and partnership with us, including Boots on the Ground, which only happens once a year. With the new funding, it is going on twice year now. It proved to be a very valuable contribution in following the caribou. There has been some money that has been earmarked for it. We will continue to make increased investments, working with our co-management partner on the preservation of caribou in the Northwest Territories, which is very important to us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.