

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

**QUESTION 7-19(2): CARIBOU EMERGENCY**

**FEBRUARY 5, 2020**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. As I understand it, the previous cabinet approved the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan. Can the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources tell us how he intends to implement this range plan when there are no resources or timelines identified in the plan? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. **MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member. Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ENR is committed to work with our partners to implement the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan. The range plan serves to guide the GNWT and others carrying out activities in wildlife and land management. GNWT has committed considerable resources to the management of the Bathurst herd, including the range plan activities. Last year, ENR received an additional \$6.8 million over five years to support actions for the barren land caribou herd, and additional funds required beyond current resources will be assessed as the range plan is implemented.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that great news about more money being available, and I look forward to the details of that. I have reviewed the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan and acknowledge that it was collaboratively developed and its technically sound. The problem has been with habitat protection, where virtually nothing has been done in terms of execution. Can the Minister tell us when this government is finally going to protect key habitat, either temporarily, with recommended mobile caribou-conservation measures, or permanent land withdrawals?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** The government is currently working with our co-management partners to identify high-priority habitats through traditional knowledge 25 workshops with elders and land users. As well, once areas are identified, the government will work with our partners to identify appropriate ways for protection.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of time. This is an emergency. We know where some of these areas are. There have been several traditional knowledge studies and other work that has identified this key habitat. Key habitat lies on both sides of the NWT-Nunavut boundary. Can the Minister provide an update as to the status of the negotiations towards a transboundary caribou agreement with the Government of Nunavut, and what role will Regular MLAs play?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** The government works closely with the Government of Nunavut and our co-management partners in the management of the Bathurst herd. The two governments signed an MOU to work together on caribou research, monitoring, and management of shared barren-ground caribou herds in 2017, and we presently are working to update that MOU. ENR has committed to provide the committee with a briefing on caribou management, which will include an update on our relationship with Nunavut on caribou.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that, and I look forward to the briefing and actually seeing a signed transboundary agreement some point soon, but the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board, in approving the joint management proposal, the most recent one, directed that an adaptive management framework be developed for the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds. The Minister has accepted that recommendation, so can he tell us how this adaptive framework is going to help with recovery of these herds, and whether actions will finally include habitat protection? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** I'd like to thank the Member for bringing these up. It's important, and he keeps us on our toes, and I appreciate that. I thank him for these questions here today. The Tlicho Government and the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board are currently working together to develop an adaptive management framework for the Bathurst herd. The Barren-land Caribou Technical Working Group has prepared a draft framework. This framework will help us make decisions by all co-management partners on the Bathurst caribou herd management, including habitat protection. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.