

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
QUESTION 8-19(2): TECK RESOURCES FRONTIER MINE

February 5, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. The 24,000-acre Teck Resources Frontier tar sands mine is heading for a decision by the federal government very soon. It's going to operate for over 40 years. An independent panel has reviewed the project and found that there would be high-magnitude, irreversible impacts on the environment; it's upstream of us. So I'd like to ask the Minister whether this government has actually participated in the environmental assessment of this project. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The environmental assessment for Teck Frontier began in January 2012. The government did not make a submission to the Environmental Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. At the time of the environmental assessment, the GNWT was actively negotiating with the Government of Alberta towards a bilateral water management agreement. The Alberta-NWT bilateral water management agreement addresses concerns related to upstream development and was signed in March 2015. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. The GNWT previously has opposed these kinds of upstream developments, whether they are pulp mills, tar sands projects, and so on. We actually got to appoint somebody to one of these panels at one point, a resident of the Northwest Territories. Our government has been on record as opposing these sorts of things in the past, so I'd like to know whether our government has actually taken a position on the Teck Resources Frontier tar sands mine.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Under the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement, which was signed by the federal government, NWT, Alberta, Yukon, BC, and Saskatchewan in 1997, each party to the agreement maintains the right to manage the use of water resources within its own jurisdictions, providing the ecological integrity of the aquatic ecological system is maintained. The GNWT's position is that upholding this agreement ensures that the commitment of the bilateral agreement with Alberta is adhered to.

MR. O'REILLY: That's great to hear from the Minister, that we've got a transboundary water agreement, but that shouldn't stop us from taking a position on this project that's

upstream of us. We're not going to get any benefits; we're just going to get the effluent downstream. I'd like to know from the Minister: he's talked about this transboundary water agreement with Alberta. What help can that agreement give us in terms of adverse impacts?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: The Alberta-NWT bilateral water management agreement was signed in March 2015. This agreement makes a clear commitment that Alberta will maintain the health of the aquatic ecological system of our shared waters, which include water quality, quantity and biology of the Slave River. Upstream monitoring by Alberta and the federal government provides the GNWT with an early warning of changes and an opportunity to mitigate effects before they are realized at the border. The GNWT monitors water quality and the biological indicators at the Alberta territorial border and has developed a system of triggering with Alberta to protect all of these areas, including traditional use.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that response. Monitoring is great, but how is that actually going to protect residents of the Northwest Territories from this upstream development? What is this agreement, and what is this government actually prepared to do to protect our residents and our environment? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: The Member raises a valid concern. Again, ENR is in communication with the Government of Alberta and the federal government related to commitments under the transboundary agreements. These include prior notification, sharing of monitoring results, maintaining ecological integrity, cost-sharing arrangements, and staff capacity and engagement. As well, I can tell this House that I'm reaching out to the Minister from Alberta and to the Minister of the federal government responsible for this, and we are trying to work together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.