

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

**QUESTION 131-19(2): PROTECTED AREAS**

**March 2, 2019**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Madame la Presidente. My questions are for the Minister of Lands. I know he made a statement earlier today about the Conservation Network Gathering, with a different hat on, but I would just like to know what the status of the Edehzhie proposed protected area is? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

**DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member. Minister of Lands.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have been in communications with DFN and their planning committee, and we have been corresponding through letters on some issues that we are trying to work out. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. I am kind of putting him on the spot, but that is his job. I would like to know if he could be a little bit more particular or give us some more specifics about what these issues are. Look, this proposed protected area has been in process for years. The feds, as I understand it, are ready to go. They have the surface of the area that is going to be protected as a national wildlife area. The feds are ready to invest. I understand the community has lined up some private donors to set up a trust to hire guardians and so on. What is the problem? The problem seems to be our government not transferring the subsurface, so can the Minister tell us, give us more specifics?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** This is actually a very complicated file because it involves EIA, Executive and Indigenous Affairs, and Lands, and DFN, and we are trying to work with them to get a clear understanding of the process, the big process, of how we are dealing with all issues with the Dehcho First Nations. Right now, this is where we are working on it. We have been corresponding through letters. As well, the Premier has already met with the grand chief about a month ago, I believe, or a month and a half ago, to start the negotiations again.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Life is complicated, but this is a simple one. This is a win for us all. Just transfer the subsurface lands. Get this done and over with. Here's a great way to show some respect and start to build a better working relationship with the Dehcho First Nations. When will this government transfer the subsurface and allow this protected area to be established and get guardians on the ground working?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** As much as it sounds like it's that easy, it is not that easy. It's a very complicated process. It's about process, and we need to do it right. We need to work with them, and we need a clear understanding of the overall picture. Right now, I cannot make a commitment. I know it's in my riding, or it's actually in my colleague's from the Deh Cho. The other riding, Nahendeh, is part of the Deh Cho, and I have heard from leadership. They have talked to me about this, as well, but we want to make sure we do it right.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Madame la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. Look, this is a very long, drawn-out process. The boundaries have gone through a lot of discussion, negotiation. Any areas of even medium mineral potential were carved out of this area. The community wanted to protect the Willow River down to the Deh Cho. Even that area, the canyon, was carved down to a very small area. The problem seems to be this government in not moving forward. Look, this is a great way that we can start off on a new foot, better relationship, with our Indigenous governments. When is this government going to transfer the subsurface and get this deal done? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** As I have tried to say here in the House, it's a three-party process. It's the federal government, us, and DFN. I understand that DFN and the federal government have agreed to this area right now. Again, I am not saying we do not agree with it, but it's about the process. The whole process needs to be addressed, and we need clear understanding of where we are going ahead of this. Again, this is a Cabinet issue, and we are trying to work with them. We have reached out to them in correspondence. The Premier has already met with the grand chief, and we are starting that process. What I will say is we will continue to work on this process to get it resolved. The timeframe, I cannot make a commitment on that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.