

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

BATHURST CARIBOU EMERGENCY

June 12, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I would like to provide an update on the state of the Bathurst caribou herd since we last sat in March. March 13, 2020, the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board decided that the proposed 2020 wolf cull could proceed as a pilot project. The board will conduct a more rigorous review of the remaining four years of the proposed program beginning in August of this year. This revised proposal should also include "lesson learned" from the implementation of the 2020 management actions. The board said that "it is clear that communication in advance of the submission of wildlife management proposals needs to be improved. Future submissions of wildlife management proposals should not leave the board in a position where it must choose the best of two bad options. The board encourages early and frequent communication amongst our respective staffs with respect to both proposed wildlife management actions and process and timelines." Aerial shooting of wolves was to start in mid-April and run through until mid-May. I will have questions for the Minister later today.

On April 3rd, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources issued a joint news release with Indigenous leaders condemning the illegal harvest of 80 Bathurst caribou and wasted meat from 12 more animals. ENR officers seized meat and issued tickets to hunters that were caught. On May 6th, we were informed that ENR is postponing the Bathurst and Bluenose-East calving ground photo surveys planned for June 2020 until next year as a result of the pandemic. Mr. Speaker, it is wildlife that is also suffering. The frequency of these surveys was recently changed from every three to two years due to the precarious state of the herds. Wolf harvest incentives did not seem to work, illegal caribou harvesting appears to have increased, and one of our key tools to assess the health of the herds has been delayed for a year. All of this is sad and bad news for the Bathurst caribou herd at a time our government continues to push ahead with a road that will cause irreversible harm.

I will have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources about details on some of these developments and when we can expect to see a comprehensive and balanced approach to the Bathurst caribou emergency that includes habitat protection. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.