

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

October 30, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The Northwest Territories is gifted with abundant and generally clean fresh water, and we want to keep it that way. There is increasing upstream activity that is causing adverse effects on water from tar sands development and pulp mills. This is why GNWT negotiated a Transboundary Water Agreement with Alberta in March 2015. The agreement is a commitment to cooperate and provides for information sharing, joint management planning, notification of changes to monitoring, reporting, and dispute resolution.

It certainly came as a surprise when the Alberta government and its Alberta energy regulator announced reductions in water quality monitoring as early as April 9, 2020. The monitoring reductions were described as "industry relief" from burdensome regulation during the COVID pandemic. Even the federal government reduced upstream water quality monitoring including sites in Wood Buffalo National Park. GNWT was apparently not consulted or informed beforehand which would appear to be contrary to the Transboundary Water Agreement.

Credit goes to GNWT staff and the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources for responding to these reductions and even taking on some of the monitoring themselves. Much of this work was done behind the scenes to gather more information and recommend that priority be given to reopening monitoring at important sites. GNWT has also requested that it be added to coordinating committees related to oil sands monitoring to ensure better communications. Much of the Alberta upstream monitoring has been restored while the federal monitoring has also apparently restarted.

I support the GNWT efforts to date, but I suggest that political action is necessary to protect our waters. Water quality should not be optional according to the whims of the day. This episode does throw some doubt on the effectiveness of the Transboundary Water Agreements. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.