

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

### QUESTION 473-19(2): FOOD SECURITY

November 5, 2020

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Madame la Presidente. My questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. My statement referred first to this government's mandate commandment to increase food security through food industry, increasing country food harvesting, and improving Nutrition North. Of course, there are several tasks there. Can the Minister give us a brief update on the current status of this mandate commandment on increasing food security? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are quite a number of initiatives taking place right now. There is, of course, the sustainable livelihoods program that is led by ENR that was introduced back in August of 2019. That includes a significant amount of work in terms of food security with respect to on-the-land and harvesting mentorship of young people to engage in on-the-land harvesting and on-the-land food security. In addition to that, there is work happening over in Health and Social Services. They are responsible for meat regulations, responsible for anti-poverty funding, responsible for nutrition supports. In addition to that, Education, Culture and Employment is responsible for supporting students and income support individuals who may require supports with food security.

Furthermore, there now is the Department of ITI with which I am standing to give a bit more information. ITI is responsible for the agriculture strategy and for the implementation of that. We have recently put in place a senior advisor for food security. I think it is envisioned that this individual will help coordinate all of this work that is clearly happening across the GNWT, and currently, that person is conducting an inventory of all of these different programs. I have not mentioned an exhaustive list. I've given only the highlights. One other one, I suppose, is the fish strategy with which ITI is responsible, and we have advanced that project just in the last month. I have two hours just tomorrow, in fact, where I will be sitting down with the department to see where that's at. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. Could say something about fish there, but we had a great fish lunch today, too. I mentioned that the pandemic did disrupt some of our supply chains, put our food security at some risk. There was a lot of renewed interest in local food production. I mentioned some of the wonderful projects that took place this summer. It's not clear, though, whether we took full advantage of that convergence of events and interest. Can the Minister tell us what lessons we've learned about building food security during this pandemic?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** There certainly has been a lot of work done in ITI around the supply chains, monitoring those supply chains and ensuring that they are

supported. I would say that the course of the pandemic and the need to maintain the supply chains was an opportunity to develop a lot more relationships, and good relationships, across the supply chain, both from the grocery store and all the way to those who are transporting the food. In addition to that, there has been certainly a renewed interest in terms of food production.

I would be remiss not to note that, while there is a lot more interest in food security, which is certainly helpful to all of those programs I mentioned earlier, the convergence is not entirely complete. There of course are challenges between: do we provide, for example, free seeds of potatoes, or do we encourage commercial production? It's not quite so simple, and there has to be a balance struck. However, I think this opportunity over the summer was a chance to start having those conversations so that we can be better going forward.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. I have looked for data and reports on the output of the agricultural sector here in the Northwest Territories, and it's really hard to find anything. The ITI website has an agricultural sector profile page, but there is not much quantification there. The Bureau of Statistics doesn't seem to have much data on its web page, either. Of course, if you can't count it, how can we measure progress on building food security? Can the Minister tell us what steps she is taking to ensure that we can actually measure food security improvements with real targets and measurement of progress?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** There was an initial sector-wide survey done back in 2017-2018, as the agriculture strategy was getting rolling and being implemented. That does need to be updated, and another round of surveys does need to take place in order to compare to that baseline. I would note that one important thing that has happened this year, Madam Speaker, is the formation of a territorial agri-food association that can also help advocate for these issues and help ensure that, when we are gathering the data, we are, in fact, going to the right places to gather the data from that membership. Hopefully, there can be, in fact, more information and more quantified information going forward.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Madame la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. I really look forward to counting carrots in the future. We are going to get some hard statistics. I spoke about how ITI's efforts on agriculture seem to be largely focused on business and commercial food production. I think that there is some real urgency in building a food security strategy here for the Northwest Territories. Can the Minister commit to developing a real food security strategy for the Northwest Territories that incorporates food self-sufficiency, including agriculture, country foods, inter-settlement trade, and programs that deliver on targets, with regular evaluation reporting? Can the Minister commit to a food security strategy for the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** The need to look at food security and to improve food security is part of the mandate of this government, but the ITI lead is focused largely on

the commercial side of that. It is not the only side of the food security issue, and that is why Health and Social Services, ECE, and ENR are also involved, because each department has a part to play. Again, I can certainly reaffirm the commitment to achieve what's in the mandate, but I cannot stand alone and say that there will be a particular strategy developed. I would again point back to the fact that we do have now the senior advisor of food security who can ensure that this work is being coordinated so that we can achieve the mandate item around food security. Thank you, Madam Speaker.