

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Inuvialuit Water Board
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Operating Budget Review
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MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think I ask this almost every budget: the Inuvialuit Water Board. This is, I know, some kind of artefact of devolution. They do good work; they've got good staff. Why are they kind of on our payroll? I know we get money from the federal government for this, but these folks should be independent of GNWT, like the other land and water boards. I just don't understand why this is here. They should be getting their own money outside of the budget. This is just kind of like the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority. It's another one of these instances where this was a federally funded institution of public government, and now it's for GNWT. What are we doing to make this board really independent and allow them to hire their own staff, look after their own budget, do all their own stuff, instead of us doing it? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I can honestly say that I've been beside the Member for four years on the other side, and he has asked this question here. We've talked. We've looked at this, trying to find options there. The biggest challenge right now is our benefit package. When we were talking with the staff and that, that's the challenge. They don't want to lose the benefits, which will then have an impact on finding people to hire and that. We've had conversations with the chair. We've looked at it. They have a new chair. My understanding is that we're working with them on it. We would love to be able to do it, but at the same time, we don't want to cause undue stress to the staff who work there. For further clarity on some of the stuff that's being done on a day-to-day basis, or week-to-week or month-to-month, I will turn to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Deputy Minister Kelly.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Madam Chair. The IWB doesn't report to the waters group. It reports to the director of finance to make sure that they are as independent as possible. We have committed to the previous chair, and that commitment stands with the chair now, that we will deal with this through the process to amend the Waters Act, because it is going to require an amendment. We will review and discuss the transition of staff to the IWB through attrition and the option of establishing a reporting structure. They have asked us to look at multiple options, and we have said that we will discuss it when we are doing the Waters Act amendments because that's where we would need to make those changes. There are concerns from a labour relations perspective, and we want to make sure that we are doing it through that process and will be engaging with all those that we need to discuss this item with. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate the level of detail that has been

provided by the deputy minister. I am just worried that this may not happen in my lifetime. Look, I want to get these guys as independent as they possibly can, away from GNWT. I think that's a shared objective, but I really hope that we can make some progress before I pass away. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Does the Minister have any comments?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I hope he doesn't pass away for a long, long time. I like the guy. I appreciate his tenacity when it comes to working for the people. Hopefully, we can get it done sooner than later. Thank you, Madam Chair.