

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

FUTURE OF TOURISM

March 12, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. In 2019, ITI announced its intention to develop a new five-year tourism strategy. Then COVID-19 struck, and the tourism industry was turned upside down. The shockwave is shown in the difference between stakeholder consultation reports produced for the periods during December 2019 and then for May-June 2020. In the earlier report, tourism was then a thriving sector, but the May-June 2020 report was really a cry for help during the first wave of this pandemic.

In the immediate term, easing COVID-19 influenced travel restrictions and self-isolation requirements were considered to be the most pressing issues faced by the NWT tourism industry. When asked to look five years ahead, individuals highlighted the need to re-establish the international market by building consumer confidence that it's safe to travel in the NWT post-pandemic. Asked where our future strengths lay, almost all tourism operators said Indigenous cultural tourism gives us the greatest competitive edge and identified a strong focus on marketing as essential for recovery. When asked what areas do you think ITI should focus on to help the tourism industry recover in the next five years, participants said creating more Indigenous products and services, more marketing campaigns, and helping business develop new products and services.

Finally, participants were asked to rate the importance of future actions. The top four areas were: communicating with community residents to gain more support for tourism; investing in product development; providing more research and data to stakeholders to support data-driven decisions; and engaging with operators and park visitors through enhanced communications and marketing activities.

I will have questions for the Minister of ITI on how we are going to carry the work mentioned in the surveys into a new tourism strategy and whether we have the resources to support this vital part of our economy. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.