

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

**QUESTION 697-19(2)  
PUBLIC ACCESS TO PETROLEUM RIGHTS INFORMATION**

**March 31, 2021**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. I described in my statement the lack of a coherent public registry when it comes to our management of petroleum exploration and development rights. Seven years after devolution and 19 months after changes to the legislation passed, I think the public and operators deserve a lot better. Can the Minister tell us whether she agrees that we can and should be doing a lot better with regard to public access to petroleum rights information? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think this is the first time the Member has raised this concern. I can say I'm right now on the ITI website. I'm searching it and finding that process to be fairly simple. That said, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to continue in circles. I have, after hearing the Member's statement, contacted the department. What I'd like to suggest is that we have the Member sit down with members of ITI to actually look at this website, determine what's not working, determine what could be more clear so that we don't have to keep coming back and having this conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I think I've got a pretty good memory, but I don't think I've raised this issue on petroleum rights before. I'm always happy to talk to the Minister. I don't like how there's at least three separate sets of information about petroleum rights on the ITI webpages. Can the Minister tell us whether it's her intention to set up a coherent public registry, and when that might happen?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** I was listening earlier to some of the other examples given. I've tried to use some of the other resources that were named and found them very difficult. As I've said, I'm right now looking at the section on oil and gas licences and finding that it meets the needs that I have. I'm in the same situation. Yes, I think this issue has come up generally, that the ITI website doesn't provide sufficient transparency to meet the regulation requirements or the legal requirements that we have. We want to achieve that. We want to be useful to the public. Again, I'm going to suggest that I'll connect with the Member to make sure that we are doing what we can to have a registry that achieves all of the goals that the public needs and that the public has for us.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. As part of the first-round changes to our petroleum legislation, we thought we plugged holes like the significant discovery licence giveaways and flipped the secrecy onus to make information public. Further changes were promised including an examination of royalties and perhaps even a legislative requirement for a public registry. Can the Minister tell us when the second round of legislative changes will actually take place and whether a requirement for a

public registry for petroleum rights will be part of that work?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** There is work, obviously, happening with respect to royalties, more on the mineral resources sector. We're always looking for, obviously, opportunities to ensure that the systems and processes that are in place are working effectively. There's not an intention to review the Petroleum Resources Act again. I recognize that there've been some comments from committee at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Assembly about other improvements that might be available. Again, I'm somewhat in a situation of saying: there's no planned review of the act at this moment. There is work happening with respect to royalties. There is work happening with respect to improving that system, looking at socio-economic agreements, et cetera. If there's more that can be done, again, it may well be that there are ideas that the Member has that would be helpful to hear directly so that I can answer that in a way that is more useful than me saying what is or isn't already happening since I suspect there's more to it than what I may be aware of at the moment.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I recognize I've got a bit of an advantage as I was in the last Assembly. All you have to do is turn back to the original discussion paper on this topic, and it was put forward as a set of targeted changes, that there was going to be a broader review later. I'm happy to talk to the Minister about that.

I was never really in favour of ITI administering subsurface rights when the department has a conflicting mandate to promote resource development. That's exactly the kind of situation the public reviews of the Gulf of Mexico oil drilling disaster said should be avoided. You shouldn't have a regulator also in charge of promoting a particular resource. Subsurface rights administration should be transferred, in my opinion, to the Department of Lands, which is already in the business of managing the surface rights. Can the Minister say why having the same department managing the rights and promoting the industry is not a conflict of interest and when she expects the rights administration will be transferred to another more suitable agency? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** The GNWT is certainly not alone in the way that we administer and manage all of the responsibilities of government, including both promotion of the sector, as well as regulation of the sector. The three territories, to my understanding, have all three very similar approaches in terms of structuring this work. Similarly, at least certainly on the minimum resources sector, Mr. Speaker, there's a similarly even split, between different jurisdictions and managing, again, on the mineral resource sector. I haven't had a chance to review it today for the petroleum resources sector.

Again with respect to having a finance department or an economic development department or a national resources department administering both, that is not an uncommon thing to have a shared responsibility of resource experts doing that work but not necessarily the same people. At the end of the day, though, Mr. Speaker, it's one government, so the entire GNWT is going to be here doing that work, whether it's a different department or a different division within that department, there should be rules and laws in place to ensure that there is no conflict, that we are transparent, and that we

are providing accountability in a public forum, whether it's within one department or within different divisions of the same government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.