

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 728-19(2): LAND USE PLANNING

May 31, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Land about the slow progress outlining these planning outside areas covered by land rights agreements. Land use planning has been taking place in the Deh Cho for more than 20 years now. The last raised issue almost a year ago with the Premier in this House.

I'm not looking for excuses anymore but solutions and timelines. Can the Minister tell us the current status of the Deh Cho land use plan and why our Government is holding it up. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for Lands.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the Government of the Northwest Territories is not holding it up. I want to make that very clear. Deh Cho First Nations, the GNWT, and the Federal Government are part of a working group for the Deh Cho Land Use Planning Committee. In talking to the Committee and being advised that to complete their plan is we're looking at 2022-2023. And, again, like I said, the GNWT is very supportive of this and working as an active member on it.

So the House is aware, we have--the Committee has--a revised plan based on reviews of all parties, and the next step is to complete public review of this plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Monsieur le President. I have a funny feeling I'm going to be here one year again in the future asking the same questions.

Let's move on to land use planning in the Wek'eezhii management area under the Tlicho Agreement. Can the Minister give us an update on the status of this work and how much GNWT and the Federal Government have contributed in costs of the process so far. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for Lands.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's kind of a two-set question there. So I'm going to try to do the first one and maybe answer the second one there.

So the first part is the Department of Lands is working with the Tlicho Government and the Government of Canada to establish a land use planning process for Wek'eezhii. Terms of reference for the planning process is completed but is not yet approved due to issues that were raised through the Government as part of our Section 35 process.

The Department of Lands is working with the Government of Canada, Indigenous governments to determine a path forward. The Government of Canada has proposed to support a facilitator to nation-to-nation discussions that resolve this issue.

In regards to the funding question, the GNWT has provided \$52,000 in 2019-20, \$69,000 in 22-21 to support multiparty work to be prepared for the establishment of shared Tlicho Government and GNWT Land Use Planning Office. The Government of Canada has indicated a funding for the Wek'èezhii Land Use Plan is a Federal responsibility and is committed to work on this matter.

The Government of Canada is expected to provide funding for the overall costs of the planning process, including funds for the participation of the Tlicho Governments. Senior officials from the Department of Lands have engaged counterparts in the Government of Canada regarding the amount and timing of the Federal funds for Wek'èezhii Land Use Plan, and these details will be shared when available. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral Questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. But it's kind of like watching an old movie again and again and again. I've heard all of this before about why we're paying for land use planning up front and that I'll be here a year from now, Mr. Speaker, as I said, asking the same questions.

It's not clear to me why GNWT is fronting this funding for land use planning in this large area that includes a traditional territory, of others including Tlicho First Nations and Metis. Are we doing this to try to expedite mining? I have no idea, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister explain why the Federal Government is not fully funding land use planning in the Wek'èezhii management area? Because this is clearly implementation of the Tlicho Agreement. So what efforts are underway to make sure the Federal Government pays? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Member's commitment in looking at the same movie over and over again. But if it's a good movie, you want to watch it again and again. And so we want to get -- you know, see new things, moving on, and we can do that.

So we are moving forward. I have to say that. It's Government, and we're looking at three different levels of Government, and it takes a long time to get all three parties working together here.

To date, there has been a productive dialog with the GNWT, the Government of Canada, and the Indigenous government. And so we're working with them to resolve this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.