

Actions to Recover Barren-ground Caribou Herds

Hon. Michael McLeod

Friday, October 27, 2006

Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, surveys of barren-ground caribou herds conducted this summer by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources confirms these herds are declining.

This is a very serious matter that affects many residents in the Northwest Territories. Last winter, few communities were able to access caribou and the harvest was greatly reduced.

A number of actions, based on survey results from the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-East and Bluenose-West barren-ground caribou herds, were taken during this past year to address the decline. This included closing caribou management areas in the Inuvik Region to resident and commercial hunting. Voluntary actions taken by the wildlife co-management boards included monitoring Aboriginal harvest.

These wildlife co-management boards have already met and are finalizing additional recommendations for the herds in the Inuvik, Gwich'in and Sahtu regions.

Actions were also taken in the North and South Slave areas based on information received from communities and biologists suggesting other caribou herds were also declining. These included reducing the allocation of tags for residents from five to two tags, allowing resident hunters to only hunt males and reducing tags for outfitters in the North Slave Region.

The new Wek'eezhie Renewable Resource Board is also expected to provide additional recommendations for actions to deal with the decline.

Mr. Speaker, the resource development industry fully recognizes the decline in herds and continues to work with the Department and advisory boards to monitor caribou.

ENR is also taking several extraordinary steps to engage residents and other jurisdictions and agencies concerned with the management of these herds.

On November 1st and 2nd, a workshop is being held in Inuvik to look at the impacts caused by the declines in the herds. Workshop participants will also determine how to address hardships in this region, including the loss of country food.

A workshop is planned for Yellowknife in early December to review actions identified under the Bathurst Caribou Management Plan. All communities and stakeholders including industry, outfitter associations and resident hunter associations as well as other agencies involved in the development of the plan are being encouraged to attend.

A NWT Caribou Summit has been proposed for early in the New Year. Aboriginal leaders, wildlife co-management boards, hunting organizations, industry, neighbouring jurisdictions will all be invited to the Summit. It will provide the opportunity for all partners to discuss the actions being undertaken and reach agreement to work together in a manner that recognizes Aboriginal rights and addresses hardships created by low caribou numbers.

Environment and Natural Resources also continues to implement the actions listed in the NWT Barren-ground Caribou Strategy, which was released in last February.

Mr. Speaker, elders say that caribou numbers increase and decrease naturally. In the past, people starved when caribou numbers were low.

Our caribou herds can recover. But not without making some sacrifices. We must realize that we cannot continue to enjoy the same levels of harvest we did when caribou numbers were high.

Everyone has a role to play to help our herds recover and it is only by working together that this can be achieved.

Thank you.