

International Polar Year

Hon. Michael McLeod

Monday, March 5, 2007

Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, the polar regions have profound significance for the Earth's climate and ultimately environments, ecosystems and human society. However, we still remain somewhat unaware of many aspects of how polar climate operates and its interaction with polar environments, ecosystems and societies.

International Polar Year, which started on March 1st, is an opportunity to add to this knowledge. During this two-year program of science, research and education, Canadian and international researchers from universities, northern communities and governments will work to advance our understanding of the cultural, social, economic and health dimensions of the circumpolar north. They will also examine the geophysical climate and biological processes in both the Arctic and Antarctic polar regions.

This is the fourth International Polar Year. The first was held in 1882, the second in 1932 and the third in 1957. International Polar Year will have a significant impact on the Northwest Territories, particularly once Canadian and foreign scientists will begin their research here. These scientists will be working through our research facilities including our Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Aurora College and the Aurora Research Institute. Several GNWT scientists and researchers are expected to be involved in these research projects.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has pledged \$150 million towards International Polar Year. We expect to hear shortly how and where this federal funding will be used. We also expect to hear details on national research projects that have been approved by the federal government. Our government has taken steps to prepare for the influx of scientists and researchers to ensure that the results of the polar research directly benefit our communities.

This week, representatives of aboriginal governments, regional aboriginal organizations, Government of the Northwest Territories departments, the national International Polar Year office and communities are meeting in Inuvik to discuss community capacity and opportunities to participate in this two-year event.

In addition to enriching our knowledge about the circumpolar north, Mr. Speaker, International Polar Year will generate benefits for our communities. Some of these benefits will flow from providing goods and services to the scientists, researchers and their teams; others will flow through involvement of residents in the research activities. The research projects should also provide training and development for the next generation of NWT Arctic researchers and educational materials for our schools.

The greatest legacy of the International Polar Year will be its ability to provide more information about the circumpolar north including the possibilities of new scientific discoveries. Learning more about our North, its processes and how it is changing is invaluable to all of us as we deal with issues like climate change and contaminants.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories supports this valuable work. We will work with communities to ensure they have the opportunity to participate and benefit from it as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi cho.