

N.W.T. Climate Change Impacts

*Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger
Thursday, February 21, 2008
Statement to the Legislative Assembly*

Mr. Speaker, climate change is a serious problem that can significantly disrupt our global environment and affect the ability of Northern residents to lead healthy and productive lives.

The Northwest Territories is a global hot spot, having warmed on average two degrees a year compared to the global average of less than one degree annually. If greenhouse gases, which cause global warming, continue to be released in large amounts, the North will continue to experience warming during the next few decades.

At the appropriate time today I will be tabling the Northwest Territories Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation Report. This collaborative document outlines the problems we are experiencing because of climate change and the actions taken to date to adapt to them.

Members are aware of these problems. Many of you are seeing the effects of climate change in your own communities. These include melting permafrost and its effect on infrastructure, buildings, roads, airport runways and sewage lagoons; greater disruptions to winter roads as seasons get shorter and the ice gets thinner and less reliable; heavier snowfalls and more precipitation causing more pronounced spring flooding; and the introduction of new species of plants and animals as ecosystems begin to respond to warmer temperatures.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is a relatively new problem. The impacts described in this report have only started to become problems in the last ten years, but they are growing in severity and affecting entire ecosystems.

We have already started taking actions to adapt to these impacts. We repair and replace foundations that fail and develop new engineering practices to protect and insulate permafrost. Winter road construction techniques have been developed to create thick, load-bearing ice earlier in the season. Permanent bridges have been constructed on the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road to protect stream crossings and allow the road to stay open longer.

As impacts emerge, there is a need to ensure our monitoring programs can detect what is happening and, as much as possible, determine how we are going to adapt.

This report discusses immediate actions as well as long-term considerations to deal with these issues. This report provides enough background information to begin developing a climate change adaptation plan for the Northwest Territories.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources will continue to work with other departments and stakeholders to better understand climate change, the resulting problems and to develop a plan to support continued actions.

We must demonstrate to the rest of Canada, and the world, that this government and our residents are taking this threat seriously. Only then can we expect the rest of the world to take it seriously too.