

# Species at Risk and Wildlife Legislation

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*Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger*

*June 8, 2006*

*Statement to the Legislative Assembly*

Mr. Speaker, the natural resources, clean air, water and wildlife found in the NWT make us the envy of numerous jurisdictions. Protecting these elements is of the utmost importance to the economic, social and cultural sustainability of our territory.

Two key pieces of legislation are planned to help achieve these goals: an updated Wildlife Act and a new Species at Risk Act. Both pieces of legislation have been under development for a number of years by the Government of the Northwest Territories land claim organizations. Progress has reached an impasse over how the legislation would be developed and drafted.

In April 2005, along with the Minister of Justice, I met in Inuvik with the aboriginal organizations with settled land claims and reached agreement on these process issues. It was agreed that because of the short time left in the life of the 15th Assembly, that it would be best to focus on getting a Species at Risk Act ready and into the House for passage. The Wildlife Act, a more complicated piece of legislation, would follow, using the same processes agreed to for the development of the Species at Risk Act.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the NWT has no legislation to protect species at risk. If our government does not provide appropriate legal protection for these species, the federal government is obligated to step in. While this may work as a stopgap measure, federal legislation does not address any of the unique challenges that exist in the NWT.

Over this past winter, Mr. Speaker, we have been working in conjunction with land claim groups on the development of a "collaborative drafting process" for a new Species at Risk Act. This process allows for the direct involvement of land claim organizations in the development of the draft bill. This cooperative approach has recently lead to an agreement on models which will govern both the assessment and the listing of species at risk. To date, Mr. Speaker, the working group is reviewing draft legislation and is making recommendations on improving it.

By the early part of fall 2006 we expect that the draft act will have made its way through this collaborative process and will be available for public review. Following a public consultation period during the fall of 2006, we anticipate introducing a bill during the early part of 2007. This timeline would allow us to introduce and pass an important piece of legislation during the life of this government.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there are strong linkages between species at risk and wildlife legislation. Members of this and previous Assemblies have sought to develop a new Wildlife Act for residents of the Northwest Territories. While substantial work has

been done in this area, the introduction of such legislation remains. The reasons for this vary but centre around the process by which all stakeholders are involved in the development of any new legislation.

We believe that the process established through the development and finalization of the Species at Risk act can serve as a roadmap for a new NWT Wildlife Act.

Mr. Speaker, advancements such as these do not happen by themselves and only come about through hard work. Members of the Species at Risk Working Group, which include land claim organizations as well as staff from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, are to be commended for their creativity and cooperation on this file.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.