

GNWT Approach to Regulatory Improvement

Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly

I am pleased to be before this House to announce the GNWT's approach to improving the regulatory system for NWT's lands, waters and resources.

The people of the Northwest Territories have told us they want to have a say in the decisions that affect them. They want a regulatory regime that encourages resource development, ensures the environment is protected and provides benefits to residents now and in the future. Ensuring we have the tools, processes and resources to effectively guide and participate in decisions about how this land is managed is a key priority of this government.

We have a unique system in place here in the Northwest Territories rooted in the settled land claims. It is a system based on shared responsibility and cooperation that provides a framework for governments, communities industries and other organizations to work together to ensure development occurs in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Far from being a weakness, this inclusive approach provides that all Northerners, especially in our more remote communities have a voice in decision-making. We do not need to apologize for that uniqueness.

Mr. Speaker, this government has developed a comprehensive approach to regulatory improvements that includes a number of target improvements to the regulatory system. Several of these improvements can be undertaken in the short term and will produce immediate results. We have communicated to Minister Strahl that we want to engage with Canada and collaborate to ensure the interests of Northerners are considered if changes are made.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT supports a fully implemented, integrated system of land and water management in the Northwest Territories as called for in the settled land claims. Such a system would function in the public interest, allow for efficient decision-making by Northerners and facilitate the eventual devolution of authorities to our governments.

Unfortunately, right now, all the pieces of that system are not in place. And the parts that are in place, are not always fully implemented.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot agree with those who would suggest that eliminating or restructuring the regional land and water boards is required. These boards are created for a reason to ensure that Northerners, especially those in the communities have access to the regulatory system. Instead, we need to ensure that the existing structure

is properly implemented and supported. This would create more certainty and predictability of Northerners and other users of the system.

Mr. Speaker, board appointments is one area where immediate changes can be made.

The federal government's commitment to examine the board member appointment process is a good start. We believe the delegation of authority for the GNWT to appoint our own board members would speed up the appointment process. This would help ensure board quorums are maintained. It would also be seen as a move towards devolving authority to the Government of the Northwest Territories.

During all of the regulatory improvement initiatives, stakeholders have repeated concerns that there are currently no clear processes or timelines for decisions made by responsible Ministers under the Mackenzie Valley Resources Management Act. As a responsible Minister, I share those concerns.

Clear guidelines on roles and responsibilities for regulatory authorities would ensure the processes were transparent and timely and would help to alleviate those concerns.

Recent federal announcements of funding of \$900,000 for the NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program and a \$300,000 training fund for regulatory boards is a start on addressing some of the capacity needs of the integrated system. However, it is more important that consistent, predictable funding for all elements of our existing regulatory system be put in place.

Mr. Speaker, an efficient and effective regulatory system will create benefits and increase the quality of life for our residents by providing certainty to all parties with an interest in how resources are managed and developed in the NWT. Our government has developed an approach to regulatory improvement design to help us realize these benefits. We look forward to sharing and discussing our proposed approach with Members, Aboriginal governments, key stakeholders and the public during the coming months.

Governments need to continually improve their way of doing business within their own areas of responsibility. The GNWT is no different. We are continuing to look for ways to improve in those areas where we already hold authority, but as Northerners the GNWT, Aboriginal governments and northern stakeholders need to work together to ensure that the federal government takes our interests into account when it makes changes to a regulatory process that we will someday inherit.