

GNWT Traditional Knowledge Policy Implementation Framework and ENR Traditional Knowledge Plan

Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, traditional knowledge is an essential component of program management within the Government of the Northwest Territories and we are committed to incorporating traditional knowledge into our programs and services.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is responsible for implementing the Traditional Knowledge Policy. As the lead department, ENR coordinated the interdepartmental working group which developed the GNWT Traditional Knowledge Policy Implementation Framework. The framework will guide the government-wide implementation of traditional knowledge.

The GNWT recognizes the need to consider both traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge in our decision-making. The inclusion of traditional knowledge is vital for the development of sound natural resource management plans and programs. The Traditional Knowledge Policy was established by the Government of the Northwest Territories in 1997. The policy was meant to ensure that traditional knowledge played a significant role in government programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, the policy defines traditional knowledge as “knowledge and values which have been acquired through experience, observations from the land or from spiritual teachings, and handed down from one generation to another.”

We have been successful in incorporation traditional knowledge into a number of projects including construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure, environmental monitoring and management of our wildlife and forest resources. Additionally we have conducted extensive consultation with traditional knowledge holders on exhibit development at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. The Department of Health and Social Services recently worked with the Dene Nation to incorporate into palliative care programs and services.

Although traditional knowledge is already being incorporated into a wide range of departmental initiatives, there is opportunity for further implementation.

The GNWT is dedicated to working with all Northerners to build a strong and independent North taking advantage of the unique experience and knowledge all partners bring to the table.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to traditional knowledge is firm and we are eager to apply it in an appropriate and thoughtful manner to a wide range of government initiatives. The interdepartmental working group will coordinate and support departments in fulfilling the spirit, intent and obligations of the Traditional Knowledge Policy.

Due to differing mandates, some GNWT departments and agencies have a greater opportunity and obligation to incorporate traditional knowledge into their programs and services in the way in which they do business. As a result, the extent to which departments can implement the Traditional Knowledge Policy will vary.

ENR has completed a departmental Traditional Knowledge Implementation Plan. It forms part of the overall GNWT Traditional Knowledge Policy Implementation Framework.

The implementation priorities of the ENR plan include improved coordination of traditional knowledge implementation as well as increased awareness, training, collaboration, promotion and support of traditional knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that traditional knowledge is best preserved through the continued use and application. Through the development of a formal implementation framework for our Traditional Knowledge Policy, I am confident traditional knowledge will remain an integral part of government-wide operations and services.

From determining the cumulative effects of human activity on our land, water and natural resources to guiding the development of community infrastructure, traditional knowledge will form an important part of the knowledge base of our government.

Later today, I will table both the GNWT Traditional Knowledge Policy Implementation Framework and the ENR Traditional Knowledge Implementation Plan. I look forward to updating Members on our government's progress in formally implementing traditional knowledge into our programs and services.