

GREAT SLAVE MEMBER'S STATEMENT – October 15, 2009

Bathurst Caribou

Thank you Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome everybody back. Mr. Speaker, earlier this fall the people of the Northwest Territories received some bad news. News that many of us expected was coming but hoped would never reach reality. Now, it is official. A June 2009 calving photo survey of the Bathurst Caribou herd shows a significant decline in numbers of Bathurst Caribou from over 100,000 in 2006 to a staggering 31,897 this summer. What's worse is that the number of breeding females has dropped to around 16,600.

These numbers are almost unbelievable and there are a large number of theories about how or what has caused this to happen. These range from over hunting, to predation, to climate change. Honestly, all of these probably play some part, but I'm not sure how. However, arguing about how the numbers dropped doesn't help save those caribou that are still there. Now is not the time to debate the numbers, but to discuss and come up with some concrete actions that will help restore healthy caribou numbers for future generations.

The loss of these herds will have long lasting and devastating effects on the people of the NWT, particularly the Aboriginal people who have relied on caribou as an essential source of protein for generations. The loss of this source of protein will have significant effects on the health of Aboriginal people and will likely increase the cost of living in small communities as the residents seek out alternate sources of meat through grocery stores.

Another affected group will be the Outfitters. This industry has traditionally taken a small number of caribou and brought millions of new dollars into the northern economy. The majority of the operators are long-time Northerners with a commitment and passion of the NWT that is unmistakable. These outfitters have invested significantly in the NWT and have some very impressive infrastructure on the land to support this industry. The loss of the caribou may force these Outfitters to close their doors driving long-time Northerners into unemployment, or worse bankruptcy.

Mr. Speaker, these are clearly not the only people to be affected by the health of the Bathurst caribou herd. All of us as Northerners, and ultimately as Canadians, are affected. So, what's being done? I understand that ENR, the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board, and others have been working to find some solutions. I believe some meetings were held a couple of weeks ago with participation of affected and interested stakeholders to work towards this.

Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon, I will be asking some questions on future direction, timelines, and options available for the restoration of the Bathurst Caribou. I hope that the solutions have interim measures that help address health and cost of living challenges of people in small communities and the support of local business affected by the decline of the caribou. I will be asking the Minister responsible for ENR some questions later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.