

Commercial Fishery Revitalization Strategy

Mr. Speaker, the last decade has seen our Great Slave Lake fishery hit hard by circumstances well beyond its influence and control. Commercial fishing in our territory has, as a result, declined significantly.

What has not declined is the number of fish in the lake, the quality of this food source, or the proven markets we can use to rebuild our fishery. They offer the opportunity to restore an industry that remains important and vital to our economy and to our territory.

Thanks to changes in our Fishers Support Program, we have seen recent increases to our catch volumes but there is no silver bullet that can fully save or revitalize our industry. It will require a concerted, coordinated effort by our government, the Government of Canada and the men and women who make up our fishery. But, Mr. Speaker, despite obstacles and challenges, we believe in a viable and prosperous future for the Great Slave Lake fishery and we are making every effort to make it happen.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment has led the development of a Revitalization Strategy that considers all aspects of our Great Slave Lake industry. It is the blueprint we will use to rebuild our fishing sector and to restore its contributions to our economy and to the Town of Hay River in particular. I am pleased to advise my colleagues that I will be tabling this plan before the end of this session.

Our Strategy was guided by the needs of our commercial fishers. Its completion reflects a collaborative effort across governments, including within this Legislative Assembly, and in partnership with the NWT Fishermen's Federation and their Tu Cho Cooperative.

The government has identified strategic challenges and risk factors in the context of seven focus areas and has recommended 25 actions to advance four overarching strategic goals increasing lake production, increasing processing in the NWT, growing the NWT market and accessing export markets.

This Strategy will move forward in support of a business plan developed by the Fishermen's Federation and Tu Cho Cooperative. We have committed \$1.4 million in funds to leverage investment in strategic areas such as the establishment of a new or refurbished processing plant in Hay River, training and new entrants programs, increased collection points around the lake and restarting the winter fishery.

Our Strategy will also see the current business model on the lake change dramatically. It will mean greater responsibilities for individual fishers and it will include a new marketing relationship with the Fresh Water Fish Marketing Corporation. But much like the model that we recognize in devolution, producers will ultimately see the benefits of having a direct say, and even ownership in their industry.

It will mean a thriving fishery and a renewed livelihood for fishers all around the lake. This will strengthen and diversify our economy; and over time, we will be able to replace imported fish products with a locally-produced healthier and more

affordable alternative, that will contribute to greater community wellness and a reduced cost of living for residents across the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, the completion of this strategy fulfils the first part of a commitment we have made to finalize and implement a Commercial Fisheries Revitalization Strategy.

The business case for this work was first identified in the NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy. It remains central to our government's efforts to diversify the NWT economy, create local jobs, and contribute to the availability of healthier and more-affordable food choices for residents across the NWT.

Revitalizing an industry doesn't happen overnight, but this is a big step and it lays out a path for the rest of the journey. I look forward to working with my colleagues across all levels of government to build a thriving commercial fishery on Great Slave Lake for the benefit of our entire territory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.