

Respectful Caribou Hunting

Mr. Speaker, caribou have sustained generations of Northerners across the Northwest Territories.

They are deeply tied to the NWT's society and culture. Communities have always relied on them for food, hides and traditional practices.

But today, some herds have seen major declines. They continue to face challenges including climate change, habitat change, predators and human activity.

Illegal and disrespectful hunting practices are also real concerns.

Our government continues to work with Indigenous governments and organizations, and other co-management partners to put rules in place to protect the herds and support recovery and has done so for decades.

We continue to work with our partners to support people in following traditional harvesting practices and showing respect for caribou.

But there is still a problem.

We see it on-the-ground and from the air as officers patrol for illegal hunting, wastage, and garbage left on-the-land.

We hear it from Indigenous governments and organizations when they tell us traditional practices are being broken by people looking to sell harvested caribou for profit, which is also against the *Wildlife Act*.

And we feel it when fellow hunters share stories and images of wounded animals left unharvested and suffering by others.

Mr. Speaker, while most hunters do things the right way, we continue to see others who haven't this year.

We have documented more than 50 instances of illegal hunting in the no-harvest zone to protect the Bathurst Herd, and many cases of meat wastage across the winter road this season. That is much higher than this point last year.

These actions have real consequences, and I do not just mean charges.

Every illegally hunted animal hurts efforts towards recovery of the Bathurst Herd.

Every piece of meat wasted means families and communities do not get the most out of the harvest.

Every time people take more than they need, they put herds at risk and set back shared efforts towards recovery.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk to Elders and leaders, there is a real fear that these practices are pushing us towards a future no one wants to see: one where caribou aren't there; one where their children do not get to bring meat home for their kids.

Our government is listening. We are working with Indigenous governments and organizations. We are taking action as partners so future generations will be able to harvest.

We have increased the enforcement presence along the winter road by truck, snow machine, and helicopter. We are looking out for illegal meat sales online and in our communities. We are asking people to follow the law and laying charges against those who do not.

We are supporting our wolf harvesters and the NWT's traditional economy to help reduce the impact wolves have on our caribou herds; and we are working with co-management partners to continuously improve our wolf management efforts.

We are working with governments and organizations spanning the NWT, Nunavut, and two provinces on management plans with real action to move threatened caribou herds towards recovery.

We are investing in programs to increase harvesting knowledge across our territory like hunter education, take a family trapping, and site-in-your rifle events.

And we are targeting our communication and outreach to change behaviours – bringing voices together from our communities, Elders and leaders to join the effort.

But Mr. Speaker, regulations and plans alone aren't going to get us to recovery.

It also comes down to individuals making good decisions.

So please, if you are exercising your right to hunt or harvest, remember:

- Do not harvest any caribou where you aren't allowed to – including the Mobile Zone;
- Use everything from the animals you harvest;
- Take bulls to protect future generations of the herd;
- Harvest only what you need; and,
- Respect the land and water while you are out there.

Make these choices today so future generations can choose to harvest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.