

Continued Investments in Tourism

Mr. Speaker, our world-class tourism industry offers the greatest opportunity we have to grow diversity in our economy.

As we approach April 1st, the budget proposed for the next year fiscal year reflects this. It contains nearly \$6.3 million in contributions and program funding to support our tourism industry; an increase of \$800 thousand dollars from 2018-2019.

It's a sign that this government recognizes the integral role tourism is playing in diversifying and modernizing our economy, and that we recognize our responsibility to move this sector to the next level.

Today I would like to share with Members some of the investments the Government of the Northwest Territories, led by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, has planned for the tourism sector. We will invest in training products which will build the skills of our tourism operators to better deliver the unforgettable visitor experiences that they offer.

We will continue to invest in the development of new tourism products; community-level tourism infrastructure; and in NWT Tourism, our destination marketer, whose mandate is to promote our spectacular territory across the country, and around the globe.

These investments will build on the \$1.55 million that was invested in tourism related businesses and initiatives this year. They will build on the investments we have made in Indigenous tourism alongside CanNor and the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada.

They will complement the ongoing work of regional Tourism Development Officers who deliver our programs and provide support to operators, communities and Indigenous governments.

Last month, I was pleased to announce a fifth-consecutive year of increases in overnight visitors at our territorial parks. In spite of a wet and cloudy summer, our world class, parks and campgrounds continued to shine as attractions for visitors and residents.

Mr. Speaker, I have recognized in this Legislative Assembly that the tourism growth that we are nurturing is going to come with growing pains. We are taking steps through this transition to ensure that above everything else, our tourism sector is operating with a focus on safety.

Up to date safety plans are a pre-requisite for tourism operator licenses. In the North Slave region, we are piloting initiatives aimed at getting Aurora tours off the main highway, and are working with our industry partners to increase visitor awareness to the potential risks of cold weather, un-frozen lakes and interacting with wildlife.

We have also introduced a vehicle identification program in the North Slave for all tourism operators delivering vehicle tours. It is a pilot project that we hope will help us identify which operators are working within our licensing process and those who are not.

It should be noted that the Tourism 2020 Strategy is expiring and we must build on its success with a new strategy. Our new Tourism 2025 Strategy will guide tourism investment by the GNWT from fiscal years 2021-2022 to 2025-2026. Its creation will begin this fall with a multi-platform consultation process that includes industry and a wide range of tourism stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, we know that our economy will gain strength as it grows more diverse. As we continue to move forward, we can see that our strategies and approaches are working; and that our investments are paying off.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.