

Investing in Diversity

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in an economy that will give NWT residents and their families the opportunity to prosper, and give government the financial means to pay for the programs and services our territory and its people need.

This work is important to both sides of this House. Regular Members have played an important role to help move the work of this government, and with that collaboration we are able to support better the diversification of our economy. Our residents deserve the opportunity to achieve economic self-determination, and this House can be proud of the work it has accomplished to provide better opportunities for our residents.

Our economy gains strength as it grows more diverse, and our government is doing its part to promote, contribute, and invest in progress across all sectors of our economy.

Tourism is by far the strongest of these sectors. Our extraordinary landscapes and vibrant cultures attract visitors from around the globe to our spectacular home. Numbers released today confirm this was the case for more people than ever before.

The 2016-2017 fiscal year saw nearly 110,000 visitors reach the NWT, the first time visitor numbers have broken 100,000. This 16% improvement over 2015-2016 is the latest cap on nearly a decade of consistent growth in visitors choosing to visit our Northwest Territories.

These visitors spent enough during their visits to set a new spending record for our tourism industry. For the first time, the value of our industry topped \$200 million, a 21% increase over 2015-2016.

Mr. Speaker, while there are reasons to be proud of these successes, our work is far from over. The investments we've made in product development, world-class facilities, and marketing are just a few of the goals set out in Tourism 2020, the five-year strategic investment plan that is opening our spectacular home to the world.

We fully intend on following through on this strategy through the duration of our four-year mandate to help build a more diverse economy and bring even more opportunity for NWT residents.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy is another long-term plan which is guiding our ongoing investment in renewable resource-based sectors.

A number of major initiatives identified under this strategy are in progress.

The Department has developed the NWT's first-ever agriculture strategy, investing in local greenhouses; agriculture programming, including the NWT's agriculture development conference; community gardens; and experimental farming. We've also created an agriculture analyst position to help implement this strategy out of Hay River, the agriculture capital of the NWT.

The commercial fishing revitalization strategy will capitalize on the bounty offered by our world-class fish stock. To implement this strategy, we are working with our partners at the NWT Fishermen's Federation. We have committed funds to re-establish a fish processing plant in Hay River and are helping to train the next generation of commercial fishers.

A manufacturing strategy is being developed to guide our approach to locally-manufactured products. A discussion paper is currently in development, with public engagement in-person, online, by email, phone and mail slated to begin in the coming months.

Our film sector is advancing with investments in innovative marketing approaches, training initiatives, and new opportunities for local producers. We've seen these investments pay off with increasing international exposure for this budding industry.

We continue to build the profile of NWT traditional artists and their products through our NWT Arts brand. Our profile at airports has increased with significant northern traffic, including exhibits at the Edmonton and Calgary Airports. We continue to improve and modernize our NWT Arts website to connect more people with NWT-made art than ever before.

Finally, our investments in the traditional economy are paying off with a rebound in NWT wild fur sales under our Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur brand and greater use of our fur and procurement program by traditional artists across the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, while we have made many strides, we are still a long way from the broader economic horizons we want to reach. We are committed to continuing our pursuit of a Northwest Territories with opportunity from the mine site to the silver screen for the rest of this government's mandate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.