

**THE HONOURABLE SHANE THOMPSON  
MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

**NO.: 275-19(2)**

**DATE: October 25, 2022**

### **Caribou Enforcement**

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the House about the Environment and Natural Resources search of the Łutsel K'e camp on September 13th. Many people have asked for more information about how and why a search was conducted at the camp near Artillery Lake. As this search was a matter before the courts, we could not provide more information.

On October 24th, the search warrant used for this search was quashed.

I want to make it clear that the investigations related to suspected illegal caribou harvesting and wastage remain open and are ongoing.

As this search is no longer part of an active investigation, I am now in a position to share more information which has been reported by Officers.

Mr. Speaker, it is understood that on September 13th, two Officers landed on a designated helipad located a short distance from the Timber Bay camp.

The unarmed Officers in standard issue uniforms met with identified leaders of the camp.

The Officers waited until the leaders at the camp had time to meet, consult their legal counsel, and let the Officers proceed with the search. This meant that Officers did not start their search for close to an hour and 20 minutes after they landed.

Leaders of the camp did not agree to a request by the Officers' to be shown where recently harvested caribou meat was located within the camp, which would have enabled the Officers to do a narrower search.

The Officers only took small samples of meat to use as evidence, instead of seizing all meat. Once the search began, a member of the camp leadership and a number of other camp participants accompanied Officers.

The search, including sample collection, took about an hour and 40 minutes.

From landing to leaving Officers were there for around three hours.

We expect that this information, videos taken by those at the camp, and other accounts will be assessed during the Officer Conduct review, which the GNWT remains committed to completing.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the importance of caribou to Indigenous communities across the NWT, and we know that current harvest restrictions have been very hard on people who rely on this resource.

Mr. Speaker, the Mobile Zone is in place because the Bathurst Herd has experienced a 99% decrease since 1986 when the herd was 470,000. In 2021, ENR estimated that 6,200 Bathurst caribou remained.

ENR continues to work closely with Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations and Renewable Resource Boards on a range of actions to support the conservation and recovery of the Bathurst herd, while also supporting harvest from healthy caribou herds and other wildlife species.

Mr. Speaker, this government knows just how important harvesting is to communities. We hear it from Elders, leaders, harvesters and families.

We are also listening when they tell us to support more on-the-land activities and invest in programs that help get families out on the land.

Mr. Speaker, we want to encourage traditional practices that help sustain wildlife populations and support recovery of the Bathurst herd.

ENR has many programs designed to encourage communities and individuals to get out on the land and to harvest, including the Community Harvesters Assistance Program and the Take a Family on the Land Program. ENR believes that this work supports the GNWT's efforts toward reconciliation.

Respectful harvesting is a cornerstone of traditional values. The GNWT continues to work closely with Indigenous leaders and other co-management partners to encourage harvesters, families, and community members to harvest respectfully.

I acknowledge that there are relationships that need to be restored in the wake of this incident. I have recently reached out to the Łutselk'e Dene First Nation to arrange a face-to-face meeting to discuss how we can continue our collaborative efforts to work together to support caribou recovery.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is committed to continue working with our partners to take the actions necessary to protect the Bathurst herd, and help it recover for future generations. People and communities across the herds range, and the NWT as a whole, expect that of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.