

2023 Territorial Emergency Response: Kátł'odeeche First Nation and Hay River

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide an update on the territorial emergency response that is underway to support the Kátł'odeeche First Nation and the Town Hay River as some residents of these communities return home following a second year in a row of evacuations caused by natural disasters.

On behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories, I offer my sympathies to everyone impacted by this year's wildfire. I am personally familiar with this experience having been forced to evacuate my own home in 2021 due to severe flooding that year. I know what many of you are experiencing now, as well as the path you are now on to repair damage and help rebuild your community.

I want to provide assurance that the GNWT is actively supporting community governments in their response to this wildfire, while also continuing to monitor for potential flooding in other communities during this high-risk season.

It was a relief to residents of Hay River when they learned that they could return home last week. However, it must be stated that the Town remains on evacuation alert and residents must be prepared to evacuate again on short notice. Unfortunately, evacuees from the Kátł'odeeche First Nation are still under an active evacuation order and cannot return home until it is safe to do so.

The evacuation centre in Yellowknife and all associated supports remain active until the evacuation order is lifted. A Pathfinder also remains in place to provide information and assistance to evacuees.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs is aware that other community governments have provided support to evacuees who chose not to go to the evacuation

centre. I would like to thank all community governments for the assistance they have provided, and recognize that this help has come at a cost to you. To this end, the department has introduced the Community Government Hosting Evacuees Grant to provide financial support. I wrote to all community governments last week to advise them of this grant, and I encourage applications once community governments have had some time to rest and regroup.

There has been a tremendous amount of work undertaken in the past few weeks. While I do not have time to mention everything now, I do want to highlight some of the key activities that have taken place.

MACA and Kátł'odeeche First Nation completed an initial assessment of damage to the community last week. This assessment will inform the next steps in recovery planning and confirm how many homes have been destroyed, what homes have sustained damage, and what homes are fit for residents to return to. Work to provide detailed damage assessments starts this week, and the results will provide information on the nature and extent of the repair work needed. MACA is also proceeding with an environmental review of the affected area on the Reserve to identify where any spills may have occurred.

Discussions have taken place between MACA, Kátł'odeeche First Nation, and Housing NWT to coordinate long-term accommodations for displaced residents. Housing NWT has already started work to replace their assets destroyed by fire, including housing units and the Judith Fabien Group Home. As the Department of Infrastructure makes repairs to the community access road, MACA will continue to support the Kátł'odeeche First Nation and the Town of Hay River, and meet regularly with administration and leadership from both communities.

As Northerners, we know all too well the devastating impacts of natural disasters and the threat they pose to our communities and residents. I want to acknowledge and thank everyone on the front lines who have helped during this evacuation period and continue to lend their support.

I also want to acknowledge the resilience of all those displaced by this wildfire. We know this is a challenging time and we are working with community government leadership to provide much-needed assistance.

Lastly, I want to thank the GNWT departments and external partners and agencies who continue to offer their support. The response to a disaster of this magnitude involves many people from multiple departments and agencies and we could not do this work to help NWT residents without you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.