

Water Monitoring

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is responsible for the implementation of the NWT Water Stewardship Strategy, including transboundary water management agreements and water monitoring throughout the Northwest Territories. Together with our partners, we track long-term trends and monitor changes in water quality, quantity and biology.

In March of this year, the Government of Canada shut down its labs and suspended long-term water quality monitoring across Canada due to concerns related to COVID-19. The Alberta government also suspended monitoring water quality at that time throughout the province.

This included some key monitoring sites that are part of our transboundary agreement with Alberta. These sites are part of an early warning system, which lets us know about changes to the water before the Northwest Territories border.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as we heard about this decision, I along with Environment and Natural Resources officials reached out to the governments of Alberta and Canada, to explain the importance of reinstating this very important monitoring. We also worked closely with the Government of Canada to resume water monitoring at key federal long-term monitoring sites.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the monitoring that makes up our early warning system is now back up and running. The Alberta government resumed its monitoring in June, and Oil Sands Monitoring has been in place since August. Environment and Natural Resources quickly adapted its fieldwork procedures so it could continue to monitor water in the Northwest Territories safely during the

pandemic with only slight delays, and for this the department should be commended.

Our transboundary agreements are the most comprehensive of their kind. In addition to the commitments on water quality and quantity, these agreements also recognize the importance of biological indicators and traditional knowledge. Triggers set under the agreements, which are reported on in annual reports, help ensure that any issues that could put Northwest Territories waters at risk can be addressed early on.

Mr. Speaker, water levels this year across parts of the Mackenzie River Basin have been very high. Water levels on Great Slave Lake were higher than we have ever seen. This has caused changes in the water. More dirt or sediment is being washed into the lakes and rivers, and there was a larger plume of sediment in Great Slave Lake lasting later in the season.

Higher sediment has also resulted in higher concentrations of metals in some cases the highest levels ever recorded in the Slave and Hay Rivers. Although total metal concentrations are higher than usual, they are not in a form that is readily available to be taken up by aquatic species.

The work to analyze water samples gathered this summer is ongoing, and we plan to release the results as they are available. Environment and Natural Resources is also working with our neighbours in Alberta and British Columbia to better understand the contributions from upstream watersheds to water levels in Great Slave Lake, including the role of the Bennett Dam in British Columbia.

Many Northerners are wondering what will happen to water levels this winter. We already know the high-water levels are mostly due to more rain and snow across Alberta and the southern Northwest Territories, some areas received up to twice as much rain this year. Environment and Natural Resources is taking a closer look at

the factors affecting water levels and will release the results of this work once complete.

Mr. Speaker, the health of our water is of critical importance to residents of the Northwest Territories. Environment and Natural Resources will continue to collaborate with our transboundary partners to manage water resources in a sustainable manner to maintain the ecological integrity of the Mackenzie River Basin, for present and future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.