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Caribou Management Decisions

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak again today about caribou and the importance of this great resource that it provides to our people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear! Hear!

MR. RAMSAY: Mr. Speaker, I take my job and my responsibility to my constituents very seriously. I have a duty to represent all of my constituents and, when it comes to the harvesting of caribou, I have aboriginal harvesters, non-aboriginal harvesters and the outfitters to represent. The difficult task in all of this is the fact that I have not been given the opportunity to debate, question and discuss the crucial piece of information that is missing, and that is the numbers.

ENR itself has some very conflicting numbers in terms of total number of animals in this territory. The Minister of ENR has all but admitted that his department does not have a concrete answer on what the total population of caribou is in the Northwest Territories today. Yet his department was ready to kill the caribou outfitting industry in the North Slave region based on best guesses, without consultation with Nunavut and, worse yet, without consultation with the Regular Members of this House.

AN HON. MEMBER: Shame.

MR. RAMSAY: The big question is how and when was the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment informed about the proposal that ENR sent to the Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board calling for a reduction in tags to 350, which would, in essence, kill a multi-million dollar industry in our territory.

Certainly, government has played a vital role in the growth and the development of outfitting in our territory, and it would be very interesting to see what communication, if any, took place between the two departments.

Mr. Speaker, I must thank the Minister for intervening and getting the number of tags increased to 750 for the coming year. But the reality is, you can't make decisions based on incomplete information, especially with the importance of this great resource.

Take for example the harvest of caribou in the North Slave region last year, estimated at 5800 animals, Mr. Speaker. Why or how can ENR contribute the complete harvest to one herd, the Bathurst? It is completely and utterly absurd to do that when we know full well that at least four other herds frequent the area. We have to get to the bottom of it and that is the numbers have to be proven, Mr. Speaker.

The department, in 2005, told the Canadian Cooperative for Wildlife (sic) that there was an estimated 1.5 million animals in our territory, which would indicate a very healthy population. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to see the inclusion of some more funding to get the answers we need. This resource is far too important to too many people to rely on half answers and half truths. Mahsi.

---Applause