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Bathurst Caribou Management Plan

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to speak today on an item that is very important on so many different levels to the people who live in the Northwest Territories. The issue I am going to raise today is caribou and how this government is handling the management of this great resource.

It is clear what caribou provide to us and their importance to us, as they have been ever since man has walked here, to our culture, our way of life, our economy and our identity. The management plan for the Bathurst caribou herd was tabled in this House on February 14th. I am concerned that the government and the committee are creating some unnecessary concern in many sectors of life here in the Northwest Territories such as outfitting, tourism and local hunting.

I believe that the management plan itself is a fine piece of work and what I have to say should be seen as no disrespect to the committee members and those on the management planning committee. What I see is this plan trying to manage 186,000 caribou of one herd, the Bathurst herd, when the reality is that the Bathurst herd is smack dab in the middle of four other discernable herds. The obvious question is how can you manage one herd without a plan to manage the others?

On page 6 of the plan, it shows the numbers of Bathurst caribou in 1986 at 470,000 animals. If you look to 2003, the number declines to 186,000. I have several questions about how this decrease causes alarm. Northerners have always thought there were four main herds of caribou occupying the mainland of central Canada in an area that stretches from the Mackenzie River in the west to the coast of Hudson Bay in the east. These herds were called the Bluenose, Bathurst, Beverly and Qamanirjuaq.

Today the GNWT and the Government of Nunavut recognize that there are eight herds that occupy the same land area. These new herds are called the Bluenose East, Dolphin Union Strait, Ahiak and Northeastern Mainland.

How was the data arrived at in 1986 to estimate the Bathurst herd at 470,000 animals? Did it, at the time, include animals from other herds? Does this government understand or know what exactly the number of caribou is in this area, regardless of which herd they may belong to? How can you have a management plan for one herd not knowing what this exact number is?

Hunters from the Dogrib communities hunting during winter months to the northwest of Gameti are more than likely harvesting caribou from the Bluenose East herd, not the Bathurst, although at times both herds are together. Hunters going north from Yellowknife on the winter road will likely be harvesting Bluenose East, Bathurst or Ahiak caribou. If you were to shoot more than one animal, you probably will be shooting one from each herd standing side by side on the same lake. It could even be a Dauphin or a Beverly caribou.

Hunters from Lutselk'e are likely to harvest from Bathurst, Beverly, Ahiak and sometimes the Qamanirjuaq caribou herds. There are only caribou management boards for the Bathurst, Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds. The question is who manages the other herds? At the appropriate time, I will have questions for the Minister of RWED. Thank you.

---Applause