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Hydroelectric Development in the Northwest Territories

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today about hydroelectric development in the Northwest Territories. I've spoken previously that the Government of the Northwest Territories needs to develop a long-range hydro strategy that sets out the roles, responsibilities and possibilities that exist to take our government and aboriginal governments in the Northwest Territories forward together in developing this vast resource of ours. We cannot do this in isolation. We will need to develop a strategy to engage and consult with aboriginal governments in the Northwest Territories.

I understand we need to move forward, and I have stated before that in principle I do support the expansion of the Taltson hydro system. However, I would feel more comfortable if I knew that there would be a social component to the expansion. Communities in the South Slave should see decreases in their power rates. Also, we need to ensure that we have customers to sell the power to.

Mr. Speaker, it will probably take three to four years to go through the regulatory approval and construction, and that will take three or four years off the mine life expectancy of our existing mines. I haven't seen any signed contracts to date from these mining companies to buy power from Taltson. We're set to spend another \$3 million towards this project, and we need to have a sound business case for that to happen. If this project is such a good business case, it should be completely cost-neutral to the public purse.

We need to ensure that as a government we get as much as possible out of the Taltson expansion and transmission line. In developing this comprehensive hydro strategy, we also need to make sure that we have the expertise and the experience to develop our potential in a coordinated, timely and businesslike manner.

As a government we may have hired over 70 new positions in the area of the Mackenzie Gas Project over the past five years to deal with that project. Why are we not getting serious about hydro and the potential that it has? To my knowledge, we've not hired one person with any degree of experience or expertise in this area, which makes me wonder: who is developing this hydro strategy, Mr. Speaker? Thank you.