

Developing Approaches to Land Tenure

Mr. Speaker, having a clear, consistent and predictable approach to how the Government of the Northwest Territories manages the land it is responsible for is important to all land users and stakeholders in the territory.

It is also important that the people we serve understand how land in the NWT is administered and that we continually evaluate opportunities and issues associated with various types of land tenure.

Mr. Speaker, to help address one of these issues, that of equity leases, the Department of Lands revised the Land Pricing Policy which had not seen substantial amendments since it was originally established in 1997. One of the changes made to the Policy was the removal of the equity lease provision on Commissioner's Land. With these changes, which came into effect in June, the Government is no longer offering equity leases.

Equity leases served a purpose at the time, but over the course of 30 years, their provisions have been interpreted differently amongst approximately 240 leaseholders, and have created implementation challenges for the Department of Lands. Now, under a new era of land management in our territory, we are working on new approaches that better fit modern, societal and institutional land needs.

In support of these changes, I have directed the Department of Lands to conduct a review of all equity leases across the Northwest Territories, and to examine potential paths forward. These options may include the possibility of offering fee simple title to existing equity leaseholders, where appropriate, pending the conclusion of this review and consultation process.

I want to make sure that individuals with existing equity leases which may be coming to maturity know that they can continue to use their land under the present terms and conditions of their leases. Staff with the Department will be officially communicating this approach to individual leaseholders in the near future.

In support of the many commitments linked to land management in our mandate, the Department is also developing an inventory of available land for agricultural purposes on Territorial Lands to support the Agricultural Strategy lead by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Processes and procedures are being created related to land tenure so that applications for agricultural purposes can be considered a commercial/industrial activity under the general lease application process.

Mr. Speaker, the work that we are doing to develop land tenure approaches will create a more solid land management system for residents, businesses and industry. As we take on multiple initiatives to advance this goal, we will strive to make sure that our practices and approaches are clear, fair and understood by all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.