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 MLA, HAY RIVER SOUTH

JUL 29 2015

Oral Question 833-17(5) Morel Mushroom Harvesting Concerns

This letter is further to my commitment made in the Legislative Assembly on May 29, 2015, regarding Oral Question 833-17(5) Morel Mushroom Harvesting Concerns. During our dialogue, I committed to see whether the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) has anything in place to monitor mushroom harvesters who are here in the Northwest Territories (NWT), where they are at and to provide to you a more thorough response on that monitoring. I also committed to look and try to quantify what the economic uptake was on the morel mushroom harvest this summer.

The harvest of morel mushrooms is neither new nor unique to the NWT. Anecdotal evidence is available suggesting this activity has been going on here in the NWT sporadically for approximately the last 20 years. Southern buyers and harvesters track forest fires each year, and travel to burn sites the following year where they believe best prospects exist. Northern residents, aside from a very few, have not typically been involved in past harvests, with the exception of last year's harvest in the Dehcho Region.

ITI does not have the mandate or the resources to monitor or track morel harvesters. The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), administers the issuance of business licences that are required to carry on business in the NWT. The Department of Lands issues land use permits. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) administers both the *Forest Management Act* and the *Wildlife Act*. The aforementioned departments, along with ITI, are all participating in supporting morel harvesting by NWT residents and their requirements have all been identified in various publications that have been made available on ITI's website at: <http://www.iti.gov.nt.ca/infopage/morel-mushrooms>. The Minister of ENR has also announced plans to put in place regulations under the *Forest Management Act*.

In terms of quantifying the impact on the economy, the actual out-of-pocket expenses to harvest morel mushrooms is very inexpensive. All that is required is a pocket knife and a plastic bucket. We know goods and services are being utilized, but to measure these would be very difficult. Businesses in the North Slave, South Slave and Dehcho Regions are likely seeing the positive impacts.

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There are purchases being made by both northern and southern harvesters and buyers. Harvesters and buyers operate with a very low overhead, so they do not usually use hotels. Costs are usually comprised of food, fuel and some related dry goods, amounting to approximately \$150 per person per day.

On the other side of the equation, harvests are neither reliable nor consistent. Harvests do not occur every year. Harvests can come to a very quick end if a forest fire takes place in the affected area, or as a result of very hot, dry weather conditions that are often seen in late June and July. The number of harvesters changes every day, sometimes dramatically, making it even more difficult to collect any really useful data. ITI has no means to compel a harvester or buyer to provide a report on sales. Most business appears to be conducted with cash, versus cheques or credit cards; as a result, the "paper trail" is almost non-existent.

ITI will continue to support NWT residents to participate in the morel mushroom harvest and will be in a position to assess what kinds of economic data and analysis may be available to the end of the season.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.



David Ramsay
Minister

c. Honourable J. Michael Miltenberger
Minister, ENR

Honourable Robert C. McLeod
Minister of MACA
Minister of Lands

Mr. Peter Vician
Deputy Minister, ITI

Mr. Tim Mercer
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. David Hastings
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