



15th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

Report on Progress on
Committee Priorities
and Objectives

Chair: Mr. Kevin Menicoche

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SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight is pleased to provide its Report on Progress on Committee Priorities and Objectives and commends it to the House.

Kevin Menicoche, MLA
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT
REPORT ON PROGRESS ON
COMMITTEE PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES**

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2004, the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight held a two-day operational planning workshop to review its mandate and set its priorities and objectives for the 15th Assembly. These plans were shared with our colleagues and the public in our first Report on Priorities and Objectives, which we presented to the Legislative Assembly on June 1, 2004.

The Committee held its second operational and strategic planning workshop in Tuktoyaktuk from April 15 to 17, 2005, at which time we reviewed progress made to date on our priorities and objectives. This report summarizes that progress as we see it and sets out our broad direction for the remainder of the 15th Assembly.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight includes all eleven Regular Members. Its mandate as set out in the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly* is to:

1. Review issues which have government-wide implications, including the overview of the budget and fiscal framework;
2. Review multi-year business plans, budgets and Bills of the Department of the Executive, including the Executive Offices, the Financial Management Board Secretariat, and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and of the Department of Finance;
3. Consider the budgets and financial management of any other boards and agencies that are outside the responsibility of any standing committee;
4. Examine the reports on the annual financial statements and public accounts of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the report of the Auditor General.
5. Review government reports on financial and performance results on program and policy evaluations to ensure anticipated outcomes are being achieved and accountability is maximized;
6. Review, as necessary or appropriate, the annual and other reports of statutory officers of the Legislative Assembly, including the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Equal Pay Commissioner and the Human Rights Commissioner;
7. Coordinate House business, scheduling and planning in cooperation with appropriate Cabinet representatives; and,
8. Consider any other matters referred by the House.

The Vision adopted by the Committee in April 2004 is:

A strong, effective consensus government that has the confidence of the people of the NWT.

Our Mission is:

To take purposeful and unified action, where appropriate, to support, question or oppose government initiatives and to hold government accountable. We will also use our collective power to influence government to take action and/or to change its policies when in the public interest.

PROGRESS ON COMMITTEE PRIORITIES

As we stated in our June 2004 Report on Priorities and Objectives, our key priority is:

Holding government accountable to our collective 15th Assembly vision and goals.

In June 2004, the Government released its strategic plan, *Self-reliant People, Communities and Northwest Territories – A Shared Responsibility*, which set out the broad direction for the Government based on the 15th Assembly's collective vision and goals. The Standing Committee's review of the Government's draft business plans has been and will continue to be an important tool to hold the Government accountable to our collective vision and goals. The Committee also looks forward to a progress report from the Government on the implementation of its strategic plan, and, in the meantime, would offer the following general comments.

Generally, the Committee is satisfied that the Government is doing its best to negotiate a fair devolution and resource revenue sharing deal for our Territory, which is key to Goal 1, *A strong northern voice and identity*. The Committee supported a Benefits of Our Northern Resources motion on October 21, 2004 that included a resolution:

That the Legislative Assembly urges the federal government to negotiate a fair resource revenue sharing agreement that provides northern governments with an equitable share of royalties from our hydrocarbons and minerals as essential to ensuring the people of the Northwest Territories are the primary beneficiaries of the development of our resources.

Successful negotiation and implementation of Aboriginal land, resource and self-government agreements in all regions is also key to achieving this goal. The Committee is concerned that the Government is far behind on aspects of land claims implementation, for example, new wildlife legislation and economic measures.

Goal 2 is *Healthy, educated people living in safe communities, who are able to contribute and take advantage of life's opportunities*. In light of this Goal, the Committee is especially concerned that the Government appears to have made little progress in implementing the Social Agenda. A specific issue mentioned in our Report on the Review of the Draft 2005-2006 Main Estimates is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and the need for a coordinated approach and increased profile across Government.

Goal 3 is *Well-governed, sustainable communities and regions able to fulfill their potential*. As we heard from delegates at the April 2005 Circle of Northern Leaders Meeting in Inuvik, budgets for community programs have not kept pace with increasing costs and in many cases have been cut. Our capital program has also not been sufficient to keep up with community infrastructure needs. The Committee hopes that Government will make it a priority to put any new revenues from the Northern Strategy and resource revenue sharing toward rectifying this situation.

Goal 4 is *A diversified economy that provides northerners with opportunities and choices*. To ensure its future viability, the Northwest Territories need a diversified economy that does not rely on a single mega-project or industry for its sustainability. The Committee urges the Government not to neglect smaller sectors such as tourism and fisheries as it pursues development of larger industries such as mining and oil and gas.

Goal 5 is *Care and protection of natural environment*. The Committee looks forward to an increased profile for this goal with the creation of the new Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Greenhouse gas emissions, environmental safety and contaminated sites are areas of special concern for Committee Members.

Restructuring of the GNWT's Internal Human Resource Services to Provide a More Efficient and Accountable System

The Committee supported the Government's initiative to centralize human resource services, and will continue to monitor its implementation to ensure it does result in a more efficient and accountable system.

A Reconsideration of Past Reports and Recommendations on the GNWT's Affirmative Action Policy

Members believe that a reconsideration of past reports on the Affirmative Action Policy is timely given the recent restructuring of the GNWT's human resource services and the opportunities this will create to revise our policies and ensure their consistent application across the Government.

Division of the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development

The Committee was pleased that the Government moved quickly on this initiative and that the Division of the Department is now for the most part complete. Members appreciated the Minister's willingness to consider their suggestions throughout the planning stages.

A Review of All GNWT Boards And Agencies

Two Members of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight are participating in a Joint Cabinet/AOC Committee on Boards and Agencies. The Joint Committee has advanced a great deal of work on data gathering and preparing a new Governance Framework for Boards and Agencies, including a policy on boards and agencies. The Committee is pleased with the progress made to date and the joint Cabinet/AOC approach to this initiative.

A Review of the Operations and Mandate of the NWT Housing Corporation, Including the Rent Scales for Social Housing

Effective April 1, 2005, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has assumed the oversight responsibility for the delivery of social housing programs in the Northwest Territories and will be taking over responsibility for the actual delivery on April 1, 2006. The Department is presently finalizing their Income Security Policy Framework, which will provide a lens for the redesign of any income security program like social housing. Members will have an opportunity to review any proposed rent scale and social housing program adjustments as part of the next business planning cycle.

The NWT Housing Corporation mandate has changed as a result of the transfer of social housing, and it is in the process of developing its new mandate for Committee review at the same time as the 2006-2009 business plans.

An Operational Review of the Workers' Compensation Board and Completion of the Amendments to the Legislation

The Committee is pleased that the Auditor General for Canada will be conducting a performance audit on the Workers' Compensation Board in response to Motion 31(5) on March 10, 2005, which was supported by AOC Members. The Committee looks forward to reviewing the Auditor General's report, which is expected sometime in the spring of 2006.

Members are concerned that they have heard little from Government about the status of the rewrite of the *Workers' Compensation Act*, which is needed to address several outstanding issues and complete the work begun in the 14th Assembly. The Committee expects that Government will develop a Bill in time for it to be considered during the life of this Assembly.

Consideration of New Legislation to Protect Whistleblowers

The Committee has not yet begun its work on this objective and will be pursuing it in the near future. Members believe consideration of such legislation may be timely because of national trends toward increased accountability expectations from the public service, most recently evidenced by the "sponsorship scandal".

Consideration of New Fiscal Responsibility Legislation

As we stated in our Report on the Review of the 2005-2006 Draft Main Estimates, Members are pleased that the government has moved forward with a new fiscal responsibility policy. The Committee therefore considers this objective completed.

Review of the *Liquor Act*

The Committee looks forward to seeing the results of the consultations now underway by the Department of Finance and to reviewing a Bill during the life of this Assembly.

Review of the *Residential Tenancies Act*

The Committee looks forward to seeing the response to the discussion paper recently released by the Department of Justice and to reviewing a Bill during the life of this Assembly.

Cost/Benefit Analysis of Business Incentive Policy

On March 31, 2004, the Committee supported a motion on the Spirit and Intent of the Business Incentive Policy, which resolved:

That the Government of the Northwest Territories use the spirit and intent of the Business Incentive Policy to its fullest advantage in promoting and growing NWT-based businesses;

And further that the government undertake to conduct a comprehensive cost and benefit analysis of the Business Incentive Policy and table it in the House during the Fall 2004 sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

The Committee looks forward to considering the Government's cost/benefit analysis of the Business Incentive Policy.

Improving the Land Transfer Process, and, In Particular, Accelerating Land Transfers to Municipalities

The Committee is aware that the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), in partnership with other GNWT departments, is working toward a streamlined management system for transferring leases to fee simple title where appropriate, and for transferring municipal lands to municipal governments. MACA is actively negotiating land administration agreements with municipal governments in areas where land claims have been settled.

MACA is also now in year two of a three-year initiative to establish an Administration of Territorial Lands System (ATLAS), which will provide accurate graphic and written information on each parcel of land within community boundaries.

Increased Investment in Early Childhood Development Programs

The Committee encourages the Minister to continue lobbying the federal government for reasonable base funding for the NWT under the announced Federal Daycare Program. It is abundantly clear to Committee that the amount being offered as of today is woefully inadequate and will have no impact on the services and daycare available to northerners.

Strong leadership is required to ensure that the NWT receives a sufficient amount to effect real change.

Equal Access to Student Financial Assistance for Trades Students and Persons With Disabilities

Over the past year, Members have become aware of several concerns with the Student Financial Assistance Program in addition to those identified at our initial planning session. The Committee will therefore be expanding this objective to achieve improvements to the Student Financial Assistance Program generally.

Increased Investment in Trades and Apprenticeship Programs

The Committee was pleased to see that trades and apprenticeship programs were spared cuts during the last budget cycle, but is disappointed that no new investments are being made in this area. Given the territorial and nation-wide shortage of skilled workers, and the current and future opportunities for trades people, Members believe now is the time to make these investments. For example, Members have concerns that there is not enough staff available to assist current and would-be apprentices and employers.

Introduction of Measures to Mitigate the Impacts of Past Hydro Projects

The Committee is aware of several longstanding and unresolved concerns arising from the impacts of the Taltson and Snare River hydro developments. The Committee will be turning its attention to this in the near future.

Development of a Hydro Project on the Bear River

The Committee is prepared to offer its cautious support to this project provided the NWT Power Corporation is able to secure a customer base.

Construction of an All-Weather Road Between Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik

The Committee would like to affirm its support for construction of an all-weather road between Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik, and would encourage the Government to actively pursue federal funds, such as Corridors for Canada monies, that would allow this long overdue project to become a reality.

Consideration of a Logo for the NWT

The Committee has agreed not to pursue this objective.

On-going Objectives

The Committee will also continue to pursue the objectives explicitly included in our mandate, which are:

- The comprehensive overview of the GNWT's budget and fiscal framework;
- The consideration of Bills, budgets and financial management of the Department of the Executive (including the Executive Offices, the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Financial Management Board Secretariat) and the Department of Finance;
- Examination of Auditor General's reports
- Examination of the reports of statutory officers including the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Equal Pay Commissioner and the Human Rights Commission; and
- Coordination of House Business scheduling and planning in cooperation with Cabinet.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Over the course of the last year and a half, the Standing Committee has taken the opportunity to move its priorities forward through several "theme days". A theme day is when Regular Members decide to collectively focus on a particular issue in the House through Members' Statements, Oral Questions and/or debate on Motions. This provides an opportunity to raise the profile of a given issue with the Government and with the public.

A Motion during the formal Session of the Legislative Assembly is a proposal for the Assembly to do something, order something to be done or express an opinion on an issue that is presented to the Assembly for a decision. Following the introduction of the motion, there is an opportunity to debate it, and then a vote.

In addition to the Motions mentioned in earlier sections of this Report, the Committee supported the following:

Affordable Electric Power

This motion from October 28, 2004 called for a review of the Territorial Power Subsidy Program (TPSP) to ensure communities dependent on diesel power do not suffer as a result of increasing oil prices. The motion also called for the Government to direct the Power Corporation to revisit the current community-based rate structure. As indicated in our Report on the Review of the 2005-2006 Draft Main Estimates, we were pleased to note that the Government agreed to compensate for rate riders through the TPSP. However, the Committee urges the Government to apply its rate rider rescue program to all power customers across the NWT, not just those living in communities where the TPSP applies.

Issuance of Special Warrants

This motion, carried on October 29, 2004, called for the government to amend the *Financial Administration Act* to cap special warrants, and to require that all Members be given reasonable advance notice of special warrants prior to their issuance.

Establishment of Addictions Treatment Centres

This motion, which was also carried on October 29, 2004, urged the Government to establish a centre in the NWT dedicated to treating addictions to drugs other than alcohol, a centre specifically for youth and residential treatment centres in Yellowknife and Inuvik.

Adequate, Affordable and Accessible Housing

This motion from October 27, 2004, called on the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation to come forward with options to sustain the NWT's long-term public housing investment, to reduce core-housing needs by ten per

cent by the year 2007 and to develop a proposal to take to the federal government for additional funding for NWT public housing.

Addressing Housing Needs

Committee supported a second motion on housing which was carried on February 24, 2005. This motion urged the Government to develop a coordinated housing program for those in need, including an assisted living program for seniors and disabled persons, so as to allow individuals to remain in their home community. The motion also called on the Government to continue to pursue secure funding for Aboriginal housing needs, to accelerate the strategy on homelessness and to ensure community support and a client base for infrastructure prior to any capital investment. Finally, the motion asked the Government to bring forward a detailed plan by October 2005 on how to replace the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation funding which is due to sunset in 2038.

Revitalizing Community Justice

This motion, carried on March 3, 2005, urged the Government to reaffirm its commitment to the principles of community justice and to bring forward options and proposals during the next business planning cycle for projects to reduce recidivism, build communities' resources and capacity to address their justice issues and enhance community involvement in justice matters.

NEW PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

During its April 2005 Operational and Strategic Planning Workshop, the Committee identified the following additional priorities and objectives:

- Increased programming for drug and alcohol addictions rehabilitation and treatment
- Oversight of public service growth, particularly in light of the impact of future self-government implementation
- Adequate resources for dust control in communities
- Adequate resources for transition houses for victims of domestic violence
- Construction of a seniors' complex in Inuvik
- Reduction of the infrastructure deficit
- Development of an NWT constitution including a role for elders

CONCLUSION

Although, as outlined in this report, significant progress has been made on several key initiatives, it is clear that there is a large workload still to be completed during the remainder of the 15th Assembly. The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight looks forward to working with the Government to address the many outstanding priorities and objectives noted above, and to turning its attention to those issues that it has not yet had the opportunity to consider in depth.