

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1531-19(2):
DISASTER RESPONSE POLICY**

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for my statement today, I want to speak once again about the Disaster Assistance Policy under the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, last May the Government of the Northwest Territories completed a comprehensive review of MACA's Disaster Assistance Policy following the NWT flooding in 2021. I initially agreed with that review primarily because the policy was outdated and needed to be modernized to account for the changing nature of natural disasters within the context of climate change. I hoped that the review would produce new results addressing some of service gaps that the old policy did not cover. But I was disappointed with the end result that came out last May.

First, Mr. Speaker, I suggested to the Minister of MACA on many occasions that the updated policy must be expanded and eligible to more people during unique natural disaster occurrences. I urged that the new policy must account for novel and extraordinary events that may occur in our communities, especially given the ongoing effects of climate change that brings a greater livelihood of extreme events. However, Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed when I read the updated policy which did not go far enough to help victims of natural disasters.

The first red flag was the definition of disaster, which read: An emergency caused by a natural phenomenon of unusual proportion affecting a large number of people which threatens loss of life, injury, property damage, and economic disruption.

The second red flag was the list of emergencies that may be eligible for assistance, which had no reference of tornados, which was odd because by now I'm sure everyone recalls the tornado that struck Fort Smith four years ago.

The third red flag was a section on excluded situations where disaster assistance is not eligible, which includes an event affecting a single sector or property. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to state that I believe it's been both MACA's policy, and lack thereof, combined with ineffectual policies within Housing NWT that have indirectly contributed to the housing crisis which is only being compounded by recent natural disasters in the NWT. Because if a wildfire burns down only one home in one community, then under the disaster policy they will not be eligible for disaster assistance. And the same goes for replacing or repairing a home built in a designated disaster-prone area and help will only be provided to a single property a total of three times.

These are facts that most people do not know about and should be aware of, and the Government of the Northwest Territories needs to make that very clear to communities and people who experience multiple natural disasters. I will have questions for the MACA Minister later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**QUESTION 1526-19(2):
DISASTER ASSISTANCE POLICY**

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, under the new Disaster Assistance Policy, if a home was built in an area after it was designated as disaster prone, unless mitigation measures were taken to reduce the risk then disaster assistance is not eligible.

Can the Minister explain how many NWT residents live in a disaster-prone area? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Minister responsible for MACA.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, disaster-prone areas are those that are identified as susceptible to certain risk. For example, flood risk mapping identifies area that are increased risk of flooding. MACA does not keep account of residents living in a disaster-prone area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, if the home experiences two different types of natural disasters and sustains damages in both times, does that still limit that household to accessing disaster assistance one more time? For example, the people of KFN experienced a flood last year and now wildfires this year. How does this policy apply to situations like that, especially in non-reserve circumstances? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intent of the disaster program is limited to the number of times a property is eligible for disaster assistance through mitigation. Disasters are more and more common and very costly. This limitation is to ensure that mitigation is undertaken where possible. Emergency recovery assistance for KFN is provided under the federal government Emergency Management Assistance Program and not through the GNWT Disaster Assistance Policy. Individuals on KFN Reserve, whose homes were affected by the flood last year, will still be eligible for assistance under the federal program that is specific to on-reserve disastrous events. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the Minister answered about the second part of that question; I'd appreciate an answer. It was especially in non-reserve circumstances, was the ending of the question. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister explain why under the new Disaster Assistance Policy, eligibility for assistance is excluded for an event affecting a single sector or property? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Disaster Assistance Policy is a government-funded assistance program that may be implemented after a widespread disaster to ensure essential community functions and cover the essential basics needs of residents and businesses. Events affecting a single sector or property are not widespread, nor do they impact essential community functions.

The Disaster Assistance Policy is not an insurance program or a compensation program to recover all losses or to be applied to events affecting single properties. Property owners have a responsibility to protect their own property and obtain insurances where available and if they are able to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If a natural disaster occurs but only one house sustains damage from it, does the Minister believe it is okay to exclude the household from recovering any disaster assistance funds? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to give you my opinion but what I can tell you is the Disaster Assistance Policy is not designed to assist from recoveries from all events. It is designed to protect against those widespread events that affect many individuals and properties in a community. Across Canada, disaster assistance programs are not applied to events affecting single properties. The intent of the Disaster Assistance Program is to ensure the continued functioning of a community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.