



April 29, 2021

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON
MLA, HAY RIVER SOUTH

Oral Question 702-19(2): Flooding Support for Hay River

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised in the House on March 31, 2021, regarding flooding support for Hay River. In answering, I would like to provide a bit of an overview to give context on the emergency management system in the Northwest Territories (NWT) as this may be helpful to your constituents who are looking for information. I will also provide a summary of the assistance the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) is providing to the Town of Hay River this breakup season.

The Territorial Emergency Management Organization (EMO) support to communities' ranges from community planning templates and workshops, training exercises, support during emergencies, public alerting, public awareness information and the administration of the Disaster Assistance Policy (DAP). The approach to emergency management in the NWT relies on active participation, with the understanding that emergency preparedness is everyone's responsibility.

The 2021 preparedness activities require special considerations due to current high-water levels and ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. The South Slave Regional EMO has met with Town officials to discuss risk and review their emergency plan as well as seeking guidance from the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer to support coordinating an evacuation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Regional EMO will continue to work with the Town of Hay River to prepare for breakup and prepare to offer support in the event of an emergency.

Initial response to an emergency starts with the individual resident. When their capacity is exceeded or the emergency is of an appropriately large scale, the Local Authority will coordinate the response. As outlined in the NWT Emergency Plan, should an event overwhelm the capacity of the local authority, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) assistance may be requested or offered. GNWT assistance during past flooding events has included public alerting, deployment of an on the ground liaison to an affected community, coordination of logistics to assist with evacuations and coordination of evacuation centers and accommodations.

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During a community evacuation, we have typically found that many evacuees have historically chosen to make their own arrangements to stay with family and friends in other communities or relocate to cabins or camps. Currently, the NWT is in Relaxing Phase 2: Next Steps of “Emerging Wisely” which allows for the following in the event of an evacuation:

- Households to have a maximum of five additional persons visit at any given time - to a maximum of 10 persons in the house. Evacuees who are not in isolation can stay with friends and family or at campgrounds as long as they stay within these numbers.
- The use of group lodging during an evacuation is also permitted; guidelines for operating evacuation centres can be found in “NWT Guidance for Providers of Service to Individuals Experiencing Homelessness.”

Should a portion of the community require evacuation assistance, most communities in the NWT have plans in place to receive and care for evacuees. Regional centres, including Yellowknife, have increased capacity to host evacuees. The Hay River Emergency Plan designates Yellowknife as host community should Hay River be required to evacuate and in need of an evacuation centre to host evacuees who do not have alternative arrangements.

Related to cost recovery, MACA administers the Disaster Assistance Policy (DAP) on behalf of the GNWT which is intended to guide how financial assistance is provided to community governments, small businesses or residents who have suffered damage as a result of a disaster. The GNWT’s program is aligned with the federal Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement (DFAA), where compensation is provided to provinces and territories for widespread damage during emergency events. A disaster is defined as an event resulting from an emergency which leads to widespread damage and application of the policy is dependent on very specific criteria, some of which include points below:

- a) The event was an emergency.
- b) Damage was so widespread that a significant number of people or properties were affected.
- c) The health, safety, and welfare of the affected residents were at risk.
- d) The community conducted appropriate emergency operations and advised the Deputy Minister.
- e) The community, small businesses and community residents made serious effort to protect property and minimize risk.

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Past events that were eligible for under the DAP included the 2021 Nahanni Butte Flood, the 2008 Hay River Flood, the 2006 Aklavik Flood, and the 2005 Fort Good Hope Flood, as they all resulted in widespread community and regional damage.

The GNWT is sympathetic to the fact that late in 2020 the localized flooding in the Hay River area caused several properties to be impacted or damaged by the high water levels, however, the event did not meet the criteria of being considered a community emergency causing wide spread damage.

Thank you for your interest in and advocacy on this important topic.

Sincerely,



Paulie Chinna
Minister
Municipal and Community Affairs

- c. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs
Deputy Minister, Municipal and Community Affairs