

FEB 24 2014

MR. ROBERT HAWKINS
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

Question 103-17(5): Profiling the Consumer Affairs Division

Thank you for the questions asked during the February 13, 2014 sitting of the Legislative Assembly on the subject of increasing awareness of the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs' Consumer Affairs Office.

The consumer affairs function is located within the Department's Public Safety Division and provides various consumer services across the Northwest Territories (NWT) with a single dedicated staff member. In order to increase awareness of the important services provided, the Department has been working on a communication plan that includes a number of measures to be implemented in the spring of 2014 to ensure residents of the NWT are aware of their rights as consumers and the avenues by which they can make complaints or access consumer information.

A detailed communication plan has been developed and approved. In response to your request on February 13, 2014, please find a copy of this plan attached to this letter.



Robert C. McLeod

Attachment

- c. Mr. Tom R. Williams
Deputy Minister,
Municipal and Community Affairs

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Legislative Coordinator



MAY 02 2014

MR. ROBERT HAWKINS
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

Question 289-17(5): Consumer Protection Measures

On March 13, 2014, you raised questions concerning powers and opportunities of the consumer affairs division.

Over the past several years, a variety of consumer protection related topics have been raised in the Legislative Assembly, all well-deserving of consideration. Invariably, the Government's response to these issues is one of caution and careful examination. As you have pointed out, the Northwest Territories' (NWT) consumer protection regime is indeed reactionary. As such, the nature and volume of complaints received has a significant influence on establishing related legislative priorities for the Department. With very few complaints received over the years, it is a challenge making these issues legislative priorities for the 17th Assembly.

As previously mentioned, Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) has initiated a plan to enhance communications with NWT residents, which will also provide consumers an improved method to register complaints. Completion of this work is anticipated in summer 2014. In the coming months, MACA will prepare a detailed overview of the GNWT's consumer affairs function that will be provided to the Standing Committee of Economic Development and Infrastructure in fall 2014. The intent is to ensure Committee has a good understanding of the current regime, which will help inform future discussion. Finally, the Department will work with the Program Review Office in 2015-2016 to examine the Consumer Affairs function with a view to determining its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improved measures.

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Thank you for continuing to focus on this important topic. Residents of the NWT and across Canada rely on government to maintain effective oversight in this area. As you can well appreciate, the level and nature of that oversight needs to be carefully measured against, and ultimately balanced with the NWT's current operating environment.



Robert C. McLeod

c. Ms. Collette Langlois
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Kevin O'Keefe
Legislative Coordinator
Executive

Mr. Tom R. Williams
Deputy Minister
Municipal and Community Affairs

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

ENHANCED COMMUNICATIONS WITH CONSUMERS

ISSUE

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) is committed to promoting the profile of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) consumer affairs function. This communication plan outlines planned actions designed to increase the profile of the consumer affairs function and improve services to consumers.

OBJECTIVES

- Develop communication products and campaigns that inform Northwest Territories (NWT) residents of the services provided by the Consumer Affairs office.
- Reinforce MACA's commitment to consumer awareness and protection by increasing the availability of consumer and product safety information on the MACA website.
- Increase consumer awareness and understanding of consumer rights through an enhanced online presence for relevant information on the MACA website.
- Improve online service delivery for receiving and processing consumer complaints.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

MACA needs to communicate with all NWT residents to highlight consumer affairs services provided by the Department.

- NWT residents (may be targeted by specific consumer group, ie: users of payday loan services, those looking for product recall info, etc.);
- NWT businesses; and
- MLAs.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

- MACA's Director of Consumer Services has very specific authorities as laid out in the *Consumer Protection Act* (the 'Act'). These authorities include the granting, suspending and revoking of licenses required under the *Act*; and receiving, recording and investigating consumer complaints; and the taking of action on complaints as may appear appropriate. Unless a business is in direct contravention of the *Act*, the Director of Consumer Affairs has limited ability to enforce a resolution between the business and the consumer.
- The available consumer affairs services, how consumers can use these services, as well as the location of these services and contact information is not currently well advertised or well understood by the public.
- Consumers need a basic level of knowledge and understanding of their consumer rights to make good decisions and take action if something goes wrong.
- The concepts of personal responsibility and due diligence should be key components of all materials developed to support and promote consumer awareness.
- Consumer Affairs, and consumer protection services particularly in the area of payday loan services, have been highlighted as an area of concern in the Legislative Assembly.
- The Francophone community in the NWT has highlighted Consumer Affairs as an important area of service. Translated materials will be provided to ensure information is available to French language speakers.

KEY MESSAGES

- Know your consumer rights, do your research, make good decisions and take action if something goes wrong.
- The Consumer Affairs Office is available to provide advice, guidance and mediation services if you run into difficulty as a consumer.
- The MACA website is the GNWT's primary source for consumer information.

SPOKESPERSON

All media calls will be received by the Communications Advisor and approved as the regular process dictates.

All public inquiries will be directed to the Consumer Affairs/Policy Advisor in MACA's Public Safety division.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Newspaper advertisements, social media advertisements, and new website content will be developed to highlight consumer rights and the services the GNWT's Consumer Affairs office provides to support consumers. After the campaign has been active for a few weeks, a news release will be issued to highlight the improved services in the area of consumer affairs; we will also send a letter to MLAs to highlight the improvements.

The Social Media campaign will continue to run throughout the year, while a series of newspaper and radio ads will run semi-annually.

Website

Updating the MACA website in advance of any communication activities is a key component of providing better information on consumer services. A comprehensive review and update to consumer affairs information on the MACA website will be undertaken to include e-services and dynamic feeds with consumer information. The following actions are planned:

- Rewrite pages to include comprehensive information on consumer rights and the services MACA provides to support consumers.
- Add an online complaint form that includes a guide to making a successful complaint.
- Publish, on the MACA website, the HealthyCanadians.gc.ca RSS feed of consumer and product alerts to provide timely information on consumer issues from a trusted source.
- Develop and maintain a Questions and Answers section.
- Ensure that the redeveloped consumer content is easily located by a single-click from the MACA homepage.

Advertisements

Advertisements will be placed in News North, the Northern Journal, and L'Aquilon to highlight services provided by the Consumer Affairs office and drive traffic to MACA's website where consumers can get more information.

Social Media

A social media campaign will be executed to drive traffic to the MACA website. This will consist of Facebook advertisements that will include consumer information and link back to the MACA website.

News Release

After the website has been updated and the advertisements are designed and ready for placement, a news release will be sent out to highlight the improvements to consumer affairs services.

Radio Campaign

Radio ads will be developed to promote the consumer affairs area of the MACA website and the services that are provided to consumers.

SCHEDULE

Action	Who	When	Status
Website Content	Consumer Affairs and Corporate Affairs	April 2014	In Progress
Press Release	Corporate Affairs	May 2014	In progress
Social Media Campaign	Corporate Affairs	May 2014	In progress
Newspaper Advertisements	Corporate Affairs	May 2014	In progress
Radio Campaign	Corporate Affairs	May 2014	In progress