

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
6TH COUNCIL, 38TH SESSION

RECOMMENDATION TO
COUNCIL NO. 4-38

TABLED ON JANUARY 13, 1969



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Recommendation to Council
4-38

Tabled on January 13, 1969

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL NO. 4

(First Session, 1969)

FEASIBILITY OF EMPLOYING TRAPPERS ON A SALARY BASIS

DISPOSITION

Tabled	To Committee	Accepted as Read	Accepted as Amended	Deferred (to Session)	Rejected	Noted not Considered
13-1-69	17-1-69	20-1-69				

FEASIBILITY OF EMPLOYING TRAPPERS ON A SALARY BASIS

BACKGROUND

At the 37th Session, the Council of the Northwest Territories adopted a motion requesting a study of the feasibility of introducing organized trapping, whereby a person or a group would be employed at a fixed salary by a private organization, e.g. a tannery or, if necessary, by the Government.

This study has been completed by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development together with the Department of Industry and Development of the Territorial Government. Their findings and recommendations are summarized hereunder.

GENERAL

Any study concerning itself with major modification to the traditional northern trapping industry must recognize the present state of that industry. Trapping today is well along in the process of a steady decline from its earlier position as the major income producer of the Northwest Territories. This decline has been substantial, both in absolute terms and, particularly, in relation to the expanding population and economy of the Territories. In addition to the general decline, the day to day yield of the industry is dependent on the vagaries of cyclic changes in the game population and on the distribution of that population throughout the Territories. Revenues to be realized from it are similarly subject to the fluctuating values assigned to its products by a fickle fashion fur market, and are limited by competition from the increasingly popular synthetic fur products.

As shown in Sessional Paper No. 1, presented at the 37th Session of Council, the industry now provides employment for about 3,000 full-time trappers in the Northwest Territories. The annual value of furs sold is about \$1,500,000, providing excellent incomes for a few highly skilled trappers, and a sub-marginal existence for the balance.

Trapping in the Territories is divided into three distinct components, each subject to totally different conditions and environments. These are:

1. The Eskimo trapper-hunter whose catch, almost exclusively is white fox and seal;
2. the Delta trapper who relies on the muskrat; and
3. the inland trapper of the Mackenzie basin who traps a more diversified population of fur-bearing animals.

The potential advantages and disadvantages of the proposal are summarized below:

ADVANTAGES

A major advantage of the proposal would be its guarantee of a fixed wage for those engaged in the trapping industry; a group which, at present, includes many indigenous peoples living at, or below, a bare subsistence level.

A secondary advantage is that, were such a policy to be adopted, an increasing number of persons would be attracted to trapping and thereby realize a much needed guaranteed income.

DISADVANTAGES

The offer of a fixed, and presumably standard salary would have little appeal to the present skilled and successful trapper, who stands to earn an even higher income by working for himself. It would, however, provide the less competent trapper or would-be trapper with a guaranteed income whether or not his results warranted it. The result is likely to be a much higher number of less skilled trappers literally subsidized to compete with the expert and professional group who now make the industry viable.

The guaranteed salary, apart from the very real problems of the lack of incentive and efficiency which it would pose for the trapping industry, would have one further major adverse effect. It would tend to attract or retain increasing numbers of less competent persons into a declining industry at a time when efforts should be made to train and encourage them to seek employment in those portions of the Territorial economy which are, or will be, expanding.

It would be difficult to establish and administer a uniform salary structure for as diversified an industry as trapping. It would be even more so to relate that salary to the varying levels of competence and productivity among those seeking employment in it.

The present yield from the Territorial trapping industry is unable to provide an adequate and regular income for a large percentage of the present 3,000 full-time trappers. It would be totally inadequate to support an acceptable guaranteed salary for the entire group; much less so for the increased numbers who would be attracted by the lure of that salary. If the salary were to be established at \$300 per month, roughly that of the lowest paid full-time worker in the Northwest Territories, the wage cost for a six-month season for the current labour force would be almost \$4,000,000 greater than the total value of the furs taken. Since this loss ratio would be unacceptable to any private organization, it could only be financed from Governmental resources; at the expense of other legitimate claims on them.

CONCLUSIONS

The trapping industry in the Northwest Territories lacks the revenues, the stability and the growth potential to be able, of itself, to provide a regular and acceptable salary scale either to those who now comprise it or to those who might be attracted to it were such a salary to be offered.

The future growth and viability of the industry will depend on the increasingly efficient utilization of the Territorial fur-bearing resources by the most expert and professional of its members. This group, which will always be relatively small, must be encouraged to achieve this higher efficiency by the support and assistance of Governmental agencies and by rewards directly proportional to their productivity.

The Governmental funds which would be required to support the industry-wide salary proposal would be more profitably expended in developing viable and economically rewarding alternative employment for those who lack the skill or desire to excel as trappers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that, in place of a fixed salary for trappers, every effort be made to assist competent trappers to

expand the industry and to ensure its long-term viability, by market research, product development and product promotion.

It is also recommended that increased efforts be made to develop suitable alternative employment for those who are unable now to maintain themselves by trapping and/or those who, lacking any real aptitude for it, might be attracted to trapping in the absence of any other alternative.