

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

RECOMMENDATION TO
COUNCIL NO. 6-38

TABLED ON JANUARY 13, 1969



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Recommendation to Council 6-38
Tabled on
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RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL NO. 6
(First Session, 1969)

SALE OF CARIBOU MEAT TO ANY PERSONS BY HOLDERS OF
GENERAL HUNTING LICENCES

DISPOSITION

Tabled	To Committee	Accepted as Read	Accepted as Amended	Deferred (to Session)	Rejected	Noted not Considered

SALE OF CARIBOU MEAT TO ANY PERSONS BY HOLDERS OF
GENERAL HUNTING LICENCES

BACKGROUND

At the 37th Session, the Council of the Northwest Territories proposed that holders of a General Hunting Licence be allowed to sell caribou meat to any resident of the Northwest Territories.

This was one of two related proposals concerned with liberalization of the present regulations affecting the sale of caribou meat. The second, recommending the sale of caribou meat to institutions of the Northwest Territories, is the subject of Recommendation to Council No. 5.

GENERAL

The commercial sale of game meat has long been forbidden in accordance with the North American philosophy of wildlife utilization, developed over the years, because unrestricted market hunting in the past had brought many species to the brink of extermination. Caribou itself has been classified as "a species in danger of extinction" in order that controls might be enforced that will ensure its long range survival, both as a species and as a continuing resource for the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories.

Caribou, too, because of its migratory habits is not a species exclusively under Territorial jurisdiction. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, have at least a seasonal claim on this natural resource. Their interests must be given consideration in any discussion of wider utilization of the caribou resource.

To protect the interests of both the Northwest Territories and of the provinces concerned, any proposal to increase the caribou harvest should meet certain criteria. Those of greatest significance are:

1. No new utilization program, however attractive, can be permitted to disrupt unduly any other wildlife harvesting program, such as trapping, fishing or lumbering;
2. the control measures required to support a program must be flexible as well as manageable and enforceable;
3. the historical and long recognized claim to game resources by the indigenous peoples must not be jeopardized, now or in the future; and
4. the capacity of each herd to sustain harvesting must be known, and the number of animals to be taken from it must be carefully controlled, to ensure a long-term sustained yield.

Because these criteria are, in part, mutually contradictory, the present control situation respecting caribou hunting leaves much to be desired. To some extent the ideal requirements of game management have had to be relaxed because many of the Eskimo and Indian peoples are still dependent on caribou for basic food. To permit them to wring their meagre livelihood from the land, they and all holders of General Hunting Licences are permitted to take caribou where, when, and in the quantity they choose. As a result, while the overall caribou balance has not been damaged, certain herds in the immediate vicinity of settlements have been seriously reduced while others in remote areas are grossly under-utilized.

In summary then, the over-all caribou population of the Northwest Territories could sustain a higher yield than is now being harvested, provided that the excess was not taken from herds which are already consistently over-utilized.

Within this framework, the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal may be summarized as follows:

ADVANTAGES

This proposal, if adopted, would increase the value of the caribou to the indigenous peoples by making it a source not only of food, but also of cash income.

This additional cash income benefit should be greater, and available to greater numbers of people, than that likely to be generated by the other more limited proposal to permit sale to institutions.

It would create the possibility, at least, of development of an industry based on caribou as a food for northern residents and for export to the southern markets.

It would appear that, given an equitable distribution of the increased kill among suitable herds, the over-all territorial caribou population might stand the increased kill demanded by the proposal without jeopardizing its long-term survival.

DISADVANTAGES

The major disadvantage of the proposal is the increase in caribou kills which would be necessary to achieve any economic benefit, and the impossibility of confining this increased take to herds which can sustain it. In addition, the more successful the program, the greater would be the pressure on increased harvesting; and the greater the danger of over-utilization of the total caribou population. Sustained over-utilization of some or all of the herds could easily negate not only the new benefits provided by the proposal, but also those that the existence of an adequate caribou population now provide.

Without a major tightening-up of the General Hunting Licence regulations, at the expense of those dependent on caribou for survival, the immediate effect of the proposal would be that the additional kills will be taken, in the main, in areas of convenient accessibility to hunters. In these areas are the herds which are already over-utilized under present regulations. Any further reduction in their numbers is likely to cause a spiralling long-range decrease in what would be almost a geometric ratio. The resultant loss of such herds could be catastrophic for those who rely on caribou as a major food source; and for those who trap on the fringes of the treeline. For the latter, trapping in areas no longer containing a substantial caribou population would be sufficiently hazardous to jeopardize their livelihood.

Another major problem in implementing the proposal would be that of ensuring that its benefits were realized, at least in part, by those for whom the need is greatest. The needy are not the only holders of General Hunting Licences, nor perhaps those most likely to be the major beneficiaries of the proposed program. Those licence holders who are fully employed in other endeavours are likely to be more enterprising, better equipped, more mobile and more capable of marketing caribou meat profitably. They could easily benefit to a greater extent than, and at the expense of, those who live exclusively by fishing, hunting and trapping.

A further disadvantage to the less advanced, and more needy, caribou hunter would be the necessity for disposing of his kill on the open market. The need for individual bargaining and the response of market prices to fluctuations of supply are unlikely to produce the best possible return, and more important, the price stability and economic return so needed by the indigenous peoples.

Finally, the effect of the short term benefits of the program might well be to divert effort from the trapping industry to hunting. Both the Eskimo and the Indian are hunters by tradition; legalization of the unrestricted sale of caribou meat would tend to make hunting sufficiently attractive to attract even skilled trappers. The resultant loss to the trapping industry, and the revenue it generates for many of the indigenous peoples could easily have a greater impact on the total economy than the revenue gain created by the sale of caribou meat.

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing, it is concluded that:

1. The unrestricted sale of caribou meat would require a greater degree of Governmental control to protect caribou herds against gross over-utilization than is practical or desirable.
2. The limited short-term economic gain realized from the proposal could easily be offset by considerably greater loss through serious long-term depletion of the caribou herds, and through the adverse effect on other wildlife harvesting programs.
3. The short-term economic return itself is unlikely to benefit substantially those indigenous hunters who need it most.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commissioner, therefore, recommends that the unrestricted sale of caribou meat by holders of General Hunting Licences not be permitted.