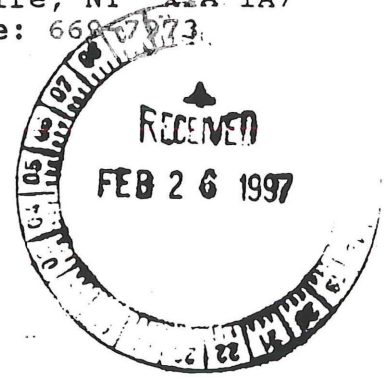




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- Mr. Levi Barnabas, MLA, High Arctic
- Mr. Tommy Enuaraq, MLA, Baffin Central
- Mr. Roy Erasmus, MLA, Yellowknife North
- Mr. Mark Evaloarjuk, MLA, Amittuq
- Ms. Jane Groenewegen, MLA, Hay River
- Mr. Seamus Henry, MLA, Yellowknife South
- Mr. David Krutko, MLA, Mackenzie Delta
- Mr. Michael Miltenberger, MLA, Thebacha
- Mr. John Ningark, MLA, Natilikmiot
- Mr. Kevin O'Brien, MLA, Kivallivik
- Mr. Jake Ootes, MLA Yellowknife Centre
- Mr. Edward Picco, MLA, Iqaluit
- Mr. James Rabesca, MLA, North Slave
- Mr. Floyd Roland, MLA, Inuvik
- Mr. Vince Steen, MLA, Nunakput

Petition Concerning the Current Traditional Knowledge Controversy

Attached you will find a petition to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly which refers to "the current controversy surrounding the promotion of traditional knowledge by the GNWT" and a request that the government clarify its Traditional Knowledge Policy.

The "current controversy" surrounding the promotion of traditional knowledge (TK) is detailed in the documents attached. It involves an article that I co-authored with Mr. Albert Howard entitled "Traditional Knowledge Threatens Environmental Assessment" which appeared in the November 1996 issue of the journal *Policy Options*, and the response of the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development (RWED) to this article.

The article put forward the argument that the incorporation of traditional knowledge into government decisions and actions is dangerous since the concept is based on spiritual assumptions. The article argued that the incorporation of such assumptions not only contravenes the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, (i.e the fundamental freedom of conscience and religion), but also that it jeopardizes scientifically determined environmental management decisions because there is no mechanism, or will, by which spiritually-based knowledge claims can be challenged or verified.

Although I co-authored the article as a private citizen and did not mention the GNWT specifically, the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development chose to reprimand and suspend me for five days without pay since the views in the article upset and personally offended the Minister of RWED, the Honourable Stephen

Kakfwi. This action occurred in spite of the fact that the article was written only after I had repeatedly raised these concerns about TK internally and no one in the department (including Mr. Kakfwi) had ever been able to clearly identify the methodology of traditional knowledge or explain how it could be incorporated with government decisions and actions.

The petition has been put forward because the promotion of traditional knowledge cannot be justified solely on the basis that it supports Minister Kakfwi's personal beliefs. The Minister, as a member of Cabinet, represents everyone in the NWT and therefore must clarify the Policy in order to show how it benefits territorial citizens.

Many people, both within and outside of government, are concerned about the implications of incorporating spiritualism into government decisions and actions and have expressed agreement with the article. They are afraid to speak out because they fear government reprisals. This fear has been reinforced by the actions taken against me and has allowed the government to effectively silence all debate on the subject. Such actions are not consistent with the interests of territorial citizens; they only serve the agenda of the traditional knowledge lobby which uses its influence over Mr. Kakfwi and other politicians to continuously acquire lucrative TK contracts. The traditional knowledge findings of these studies are never questioned or evaluated because such scrutiny is met with political antagonism or accusations of disrespect for the spiritual beliefs of aboriginal peoples.

Although aboriginal peoples are entitled to their own religious beliefs, it is not in the interests of anyone, either aboriginal or non-aboriginal, to have debate stifled in this manner. It is necessary for environmental management decisions to come under the utmost scrutiny because we all depend upon the environment for our collective survival. This survival is threatened when politicians interfere with objectively determined environmental management decisions in order to promote their own sectarian interests.

I hope that by alerting you to this controversy that you will help to expose the dangerous aspects of an unconstitutional policy which has become a sacred cow within the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, and the government as a whole. I also hope that your awareness of this issue will protect those government employees who have had the courage to sign this petition in case the government decides to embark upon a "witch hunt".

Sincerely,


Frances Widdowson

c. The Honourable Stephen Kakfwi, Minister, RWED