

Mr. Mike Sutherland (Peguis First Nation)

June 14, 2011 Presentation of Bill 46: Save Lake Winnipeg Act

I'd just like to thank everyone for letting me attend and speak here tonight. It was on short notice. I am a newly elected official for Peguis First Nation. I was elected to council March 25th of this year, so pleased to be here today. And I guess I'd just like to thank the lady before me. She did a tremendous job and I respect her for the words that she brought forth here today.

And for me, too, being brought up on the land, it's very important. And the work that I do today, I work for the Province on conservation and I also worked—I worked for Peguis the last three years in the area of lands and resource management. But my education wasn't through any university or college; it is on the land, trapping, hunting, fishing. I've been on the land since I was a boy, and I teach land-based education. I sit with elders and I carry messages forward.

One of the greatest things that we've had to deal with in these recent years is the use of the land, but not by us, but by others. And one of the things I have to ask with this bill is that, has consultation taken place with First Nations people within Manitoba? Another question I have to ask is, when legislation is put forth, is consultation with First Nations a part of this process?

As a previous employee, I'm not really hesitant to say this, but I'll probably never work for the Province again after this. But, as a previous employer of Manitoba Conservation, I was asked to review a number of acts to see if they had an effect on First Nation's rights. And all that I have reviewed showed that they all negatively affect First Nations people and their rights, or worse, they don't even mention First Nations in the act or legislation.

Anything, whether it be an act, legislation, application or disposition, that affect the rights of First Nations people, require consultation before they move forward. And that comes from the Supreme Court of Canada, right, with consultation. And there are many, many cases that show that.

Even though save our lake may be a move to try and save the lake, as other acts and legislations, our First Nations people are again left out. It makes me wonder why the Province is making this move, when it's the same government that maintains the high water level with Manitoba Hydro to create—generate energy. As First Nations people, we have seen that the high levels of Lake Winnipeg has done more damage to our lands than anything else.

In Peguis, we flood constantly. And not just in the spring anymore, as was years past, but we flood throughout the summer as well. Drainage south of us is one of the main contributors to the flooding, but it's the high water in Lake Winnipeg that compounds it, because the water can't leave the reserve.

Throughout Canada, drainage into our rivers and river systems sends water to its final destination, which is Lake Winnipeg. And you see that, everything east of the Rockies comes this way. Precambrian Shield comes this way. The Red River, the Assiniboine,

come this way. Your act, even though it's here in Manitoba, is not really going to help because all the stuff that's put in the lake comes from out of province as well. So the farmers suffer, First Nations suffer.

You know, and you're—it's like the moose management. You know, you ask people in the Ducks to stop hunting moose, but everyone else comes there and hunts the moose. But the people, the First Nations people in the Ducks, they can't hunt that moose. Are we going to close it down on the east side? But yet other First Nations will go there and hunt.

You know, you're putting acts here in Manitoba to affect the people in Manitoba, but yet, the water that comes into our lake, the pollution that comes with that water, the amount of water that affects Lake Winnipeg's level, comes from out of province. So how do you deal with that?

Three years ago I provided Chief Hudson and Councilor Cochrane from Peguis First Nation to give the Minister of EMO a package. I created that report through traditional land-use knowledge. And I told them that there was more water to come than what we seen previous years. From what I've learned from traditional knowledge, I told them it's going to get worse. And I used traditional knowledge and points that I've learned from the land from what I've seen, to hopefully, people would understand and listen. Unfortunately, nobody even read the report. And, you know, it's through the traditional knowledge that we learn about the land and how it works. But unfortunately, nobody listens to us.

They were coming to meet with a promise to repair our flooded homes. I asked them, don't repair the homes; replace them, because it's going to get worse. But no, they were giving hundreds of thousands of dollars, or millions. Homes were repaired and the following year they were all flooded again. The point being, traditional knowledge is not a novelty; it's real and it's true.

If consultation is followed, traditional knowledge can be provided as a part of this consultation process. As a First Nations people and people of the land, everyone has a say in the land that we live in, our traditional territory, but us. Yet we are the ones that are most affected by the acts of legislations and things that are done outside our community. And, again, today, Bill 46 is just another example of that, because no one came to my community. No one asked our fishermen, our hunters, our trappers what they thought about Bill 46.

I, too, am concerned about Lake Winnipeg and the future of Lake Winnipeg, but it boggles my mind as how the government could be the ones to move forward to save the lake and pass legislation, but yet they could be part of the destruction of the lake as well. To me that doesn't make sense. To our elders, they shake their heads and wonder why and how people could do this and act this way.

If you knew problems were coming with Lake Winnipeg years ago, why are we acting at the 11th hour when things should have been done years ago? If we knew there's problems with moose and other wildlife, why did we act in the 11th hour? As First Nations people, we look at this on the land and everything that's in it to make sure that there's always a balance, and the lady before me spoke about that balance. First Nations

should be a part of everything that goes on within our land, not left out, not left till last. And we will show to you and prove to you that we have an understanding of the land and how it should be managed and how she should be looked after.

You know, I think that there's, what do you call it, you know, like, the 11th hour; there's no looking back anymore. Next year, our First Nations leaders and elders and medicine people are going to converge in Mayan territory to talk about, you know, this 2012, because for us there's something there, something significant, and we will see what's to come. But we see what's happening within the land, and the lady before me, Ms. Mercredi, talked about Mother Earth cleansing itself, and we firmly believe that's what's to come.

So, regardless of what happens here, it may be irrelevant, and that's the way some of our elders and medicine people see it. And I leave here today, you know, asking you to think about that and to think about the First Nations people that live in that land. Everyone here probably lives within the city limits now. Some of you have been out there on the land before. You know what it's like, the pristine, the beauty and so on and so forth.