

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

NORTHERN FOOD SECURITY

June 7, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, hunger is a reality in the North. Caregivers can't afford to feed their children a balanced meal. They reduce the size of their kids' meals because they don't have enough food. They are going hungry themselves because they can't afford to buy food. Some lose weight as a result. These findings are part of a report by Food Banks Canada with the title, "What Will It Take to Make Real Progress on Northern Food Security?" It was published last month.

Mr. Speaker, twenty per cent of NWT households don't have enough food. Why not? Because of the high cost of store-bought food, because of the high cost of going out on the land, and because of the decline in the number of animals harvested for food. These are a few of the many reasons the report gives. Here in Yellowknife, Food Rescue distributes 200,000 kilograms of food discarded by grocery stores each year to schools, soup kitchens, and low-income families in need. Volunteers across the NWT have established soup kitchens and food banks. In fact, Food Banks Canada estimates food bank usage has increased across all three northern territories by 247, per cent since 2008.

Mr. Speaker, let me provide some numbers which explain this increase. The federal government has estimated that food for a family of four costs \$23,000 annually. Yet, half of the households in the small communities of the NWT have income below \$30,000 a year. That equation equals hunger. Mr. Speaker, it is a shocking fact that households who rely on government income are those most likely not to have enough food at home, according to the report. This is a fact acknowledged by the GNWT when, in 2015, it raised the food allowance for income assistance clients for the first time in six years. The Finance Minister of the day said that the food allowance would be increased annually until it caught up to the Market Basket Measure. But there was no increase in this budget. Increases are scheduled for the next two years.

Mr. Speaker, the Food Bank's report makes recommendations which provide long-term solutions rather than opening more food banks. I want to highlight the recommendation to increase support for the consumption of traditional food with programs that increase access to the land as well. The territorial government has a role to play in lobbying the federal government to expand and improve the Nutrition North Canada Subsidy. I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture, and Employment. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.