

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
CORONAVIRUS IMPACTS ON TOURISM

February 13, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism has been a bright light in the NWT economy, experiencing growth other sectors can only dream of. The number of people who are visiting the NWT and the amount of money they spend here are significant. I'm going to review a few numbers from Industry, Tourism and Investment. In 2018-2019, we had just over 120,000 visitors come to the NWT, and together they spent \$210 million. Of that total, we had about 42,000 aurora visitors, and together they spent \$67.7 million dollars. These are large numbers. Almost 16 percent of visitors last year came from China, a 19-fold increase in six years. Some aurora tour operators reported having their best December ever and looked forward to record visitor numbers in the new year. Then the coronavirus struck, and the Chinese government shut down group travel to reduce the spread of the virus.

Where does that leave the aurora tourism industry in the NWT? Media reported at the end of January that the company Aurora Holiday had more than 200 cancellations for hotels, rental cars, and day tours following the Chinese government's decision. These cancellations represented half of their bookings through the busy winter period. That is just one of many licensed tourism operators. Those numbers are for direct spending. There will be impacts for indirect and induced spending, as well. It seems likely that small businesses, especially those based in Yellowknife, will take a hit on the \$67.7 million spent by aurora visitors last year.

As someone who lives and works in Yellowknife, I notice a difference. There are fewer groups touring here at the Legislative Assembly. There are fewer groups walking in downtown and walking down the hill to Old Town. It is clear to me that, once the coronavirus crisis is resolved, NWT tourism will have some rebuilding to do, re-establishing markets, reassuring Chinese visitors they are welcome, and assisting tourism small businesses to rebuild. I want to see this as a priority investment by government, given the importance of tourism to our economy. I will have questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.