



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to  
Motion 47-20(1): State of Emergency for Humanitarian Reasons for Norman Wells**

**Motion:**

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh, that this Legislative Assembly resolve that the current situation in the Town of Norman Wells is a state of emergency for humanitarian reasons;

AND FURTHER, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to communicate this state of emergency with the Government of Canada, seeking humanitarian aid for the community;

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this motion within 120 days.

**GNWT Response**

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) recognizes the significant challenges facing the residents of Norman Wells and the broader Sahtu region due to the effects of climate change that are increasingly disrupting northern transportation routes.

An “emergency” as defined under the Northwest Territories (NWT) *Emergency Management Act* (EMA) refers to a current or imminent event that requires prompt coordination of action or special regulation of persons or property in order to protect the safety, health or welfare of people or to limit or prevent damage to property or the environment. It is the position of the GNWT that the situation in Norman Wells, while critical, does not meet the definition of emergency.

Furthermore, a State of Emergency is intended to be used when a community government or the GNWT require exceptional powers to take action to manage a disaster event. The declaration of a state of emergency by either a community government or the GNWT does not grant access to additional federal or territorial funding. This would be the case even if the GNWT had a policy specific to humanitarian crises.

The GNWT maintains that declaring a state of emergency is not the approach that would best serve residents and address these issues. Further, the GNWT can and has taken steps to address the various issues being faced by the Town of Norman Wells, and will continue to provide support as the situation evolves, without the need to develop a policy on humanitarian crises. The GNWT also continues to advocate for federal support to address issues being faced by communities across the NWT who are being impacted by the effects of climate change.

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The cancellation of last year's barge season is not an isolated event—it is an impact of a broader climactic trend that is disproportionately affecting northern communities. Low water levels in the Mackenzie River have made seasonal resupply more difficult and unpredictable, and the GNWT recognizes the significant impact this has on the cost of living, business operations, and overall community well-being in Norman Wells and the Sahtu Region.

Preparing and adapting to this unprecedented challenge requires and will continue to require a significant and sustained level of resources, expertise, and dedicated effort. This can only be achieved through strong collaboration across all departments, ensuring a cohesive approach to planning and response.

The GNWT has taken an all-of-government approach to respond to this situation, ensuring that residents, businesses, Indigenous governments, and community governments receive additional supports. This response is focused on both immediate relief and long-term planning to help communities, residents and businesses navigate these challenges now and in the future.

To help ease the financial burden caused by the barge cancellation, last fall the GNWT introduced several targeted measures such as providing an air freight subsidy intended to cover air freight costs that were used to fly in essential gasoline, motive diesel and diesel home heating fuel to Norman Wells due to the barge cancellation. The GNWT increased the Seniors Home Heating Subsidy rate for seniors in Norman Wells for October 2024 and November 2024 as a responsive measure to the impact of barge cancellations within the Sahtu region; allocated \$1.8 million through the Support Funding for Businesses and Communities Impacted by 2024 Barge Cancellations program to help offset the increased transportation costs of essential goods; and contributed \$150,000 to the Norman Wells Food Bank, recognizing the critical role of food security during the winter months.

To mitigate potential impacts of ongoing low-water levels, the GNWT took a proactive approach and collaborated with businesses, community leaders and transportation companies to plan for the 2025 Mackenzie Valley Winter Road season to ensure efficient fuel and goods resupply. The GNWT took several precautions to ensure a successful resupply season such as widening the road where possible and increasing maintenance and construction throughout the winter road. While the private sector supplies petroleum products to Norman Wells, the GNWT has been monitoring the situation because we recognize how essential these products are to residents and businesses in the community. The winter road resupply of fuel to Norman Wells is complete for 2025, with private entities transporting approximately 9.6 million litres of fuel into the community.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) has been participating on behalf of the GNWT on the Norman Wells Operations Closure Working Group, which is meeting regularly and includes representatives from Imperial Oil Limited, the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated, the Town of Norman Wells and the federal government. ITI continues to advocate for NWT residents and businesses to benefit from employment and training opportunities during the Norman Wells Operations Closure Program.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs will continue to provide support and advice to the Town of Norman Wells with respect to community, capital and strategic planning, and that work will be informed by the discussions of the Norman Wells Operations Closure Working Group.

The GNWT is also working with the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated to deploy wood stoves in the Sahtu, including Norman Wells, and help fight the current energy crisis, in a \$500,000 project funded by the federal government.

The ongoing push for the Mackenzie Valley Highway (MVH) is a critical part of the GNWT's long-term strategy to enhance transportation infrastructure and economic opportunities in the region. The MVH project, which aims to connect Wrigley to Norman Wells with an all-season road, will build a more resilient supply chain, bring long-term stability, and new opportunities to communities across the Sahtu.

The GNWT continues to engage with the Government of Canada to advocate for flexible federal funding that meets the distinct needs of northern communities. This includes highlighting the very real financial hardship faced by communities due to this situation, particularly in relation to the cost of essential supplies like fuel. While this is an ongoing discussion, the GNWT remains committed to exploring all possible funding avenues to support residents.

The GNWT will continue to work with community governments to analyze costs and will address long-term impacts through forced growth and the GNWT fiscal process.