

The Honourable R.J. Simpson
Minister of Justice

Ground Search and Rescue

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Range Lake on November 1, 2024 regarding ground search and rescue.

The Member requested the Minister confirm how the contract for this work was awarded and what the final cost of the contract was to undertake a review of search and rescue in the NWT.

A public request for proposals was advertised with a closing date of June 30, 2021. There were no bids received; therefore, the Department of Justice proceeded with a sole source contract with MNP. The final cost of the contract was \$95, 000, which was funded by Public Safety Canada through its Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund.

The Member also requested the Department of Justice provide an official response to each recommendation of the report, including comprehensive details on the implementation of each accepted recommendation.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is not prepared to adopt the recommendations in the report at this time given current capacity and financial considerations. Later today, at the appropriate time, I will table a document which provides a recommendation by recommendation summary. The report was a valuable exercise to have undertaken as it has improved understanding of the assets in communities and identified areas for improvement. Search and rescue in the Northwest Territories is a shared responsibility due in part to our vast land size and small remote communities with limited resources.

The GNWT will continue with its current approach for search and rescue in the NWT in partnership with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, community governments and the many search and rescue organizations across the territory.

The Member also asked if the Department of Justice could provide statistics on the frequency of ground search and rescue operations over the last ten years.

Data collection regarding the frequency of ground search and rescue operations over the last ten years has not been consistent. Search and rescue responsibility is a patchwork of government, non-governmental organizations, military, Coast Guard and community-based resources and efforts. There is no central repository for these agencies to feed data into, and no designated organization or policy to follow regarding who collects this data.

The role of the RCMP is to provide incident command support. Search and rescue is not within the mandate of the RCMP; therefore, members do not receive this specific and highly technical training. As such, RCMP data on search and rescue operations is limited and does not provide a full picture of all operations undertaken in the NWT. RCMP 'G' Division's internal reporting includes both land based and marine based responses as follows for the past eight years: 2017 - 52; 2018 - 48; 2019 - 50; 2020 - 20; 2021 - 27; 2022 - 21; 2023 - 23; and 2024 - 24 as of November.

Lastly, the Member asked if the Department of Justice could provide the expenses required for ground search and rescue incidents over the last ten years.

There has been no cost tracking and there is no analysis available related to overall search and rescue efforts in the Territory over the last ten years. The mandate for search and rescue is heavily reliant on community-based participation and efforts related to this area are largely undertaken on an in-kind and volunteer basis. RCMP reporting on costs they have incurred over the last five years related to ground search and rescues average \$109,372 per year.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs administers contributions under the Community-Organized Searches Policy, which may provide a contribution of up to \$10,000 to a community government. This is specific to a search for missing person or persons organized and conducted by a community government prior to, or following, a public search. Community organized searches may include recovery operations. On average, MACA receives one request per year for this funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.