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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on
Resources**

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Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

Chair: Brian Warr, MHA

Vice-Chair: Jordan Brown, MHA

Members: Pleaman Forsey, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Craig Pardy, MHA
Paul Pike, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Evan Beazley

Appearing:

Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

Hon. Derrick Bragg, MHA, Minister

Tracy King, Deputy Minister

Stephen Balsom, Assistant Deputy Minister, Forestry and Wildlife

Lorelei Roberts, Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Aquaculture

Philip Ivimey, Controller

Erin Shea, Director of Communications

Dana English, Executive Assistant to Minister

Also Present

Hon. John Hogan, MHA, Minister of Justice and Public Safety

Hon. Lisa Dempster, MHA, Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation

Hon. Sarah Stoodley, MHA, Minister of Digital Government and Service NL

Lela Evans, MHA

Perry Trimper, MHA

Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party

David Porter, Communications Specialist, Official Opposition Office

Nathan Ryan, Political Staff, Official Opposition Office

Sonja Pritchett, Research Coordinator, Government Members' Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lela Evans, MHA for Torngat Mountains, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Hogan, MHA for Windsor Lake, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

The Committee met at 9 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Warr): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Estimates of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture. I certainly want to welcome both the staff and the Committee here this morning.

Before we get started, I'm going to make an announcement on some substitutions. Substituting for the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's is the Member for Windsor Lake; substituting for the Member for Mount Pearl North is the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair; substituting for the Member for Burin - Grand Bank is the Member for Mount Scio; and substituting for the Member for Labrador West is the Member for Torngat Mountains.

Just some housekeeping duties. I see we have a non-affiliated Member this morning. I just want to make sure that the Committee is okay with providing that Member with time some at the end. Usually it's 10 minutes at the end of our Estimates. Everybody in agreement? Thank you very much.

Just a reminder to our department officials that if you have to speak to a question, just to identify yourself, wait for your tally light and then continue on with your remarks.

Members are reminded not to make any adjustments to the seats they are seated in. They are just specifically for the Members of the

House of Assembly and if you need water, water coolers are at both ends of the Chamber.

So this morning, first I'll ask the Members of the Committee to introduce themselves and then I'll ask the minister and his staff to introduce themselves. Following that, I'll ask the Committee to move the minutes of the previous meeting.

Anyway, if we could start with MHA Pardy to introduce yourself, please.

C. PARDY: Craig Pardy, MHA, District of Bonavista.

P. FORSEY: Pleaman Forsey, MHA for Exploits.

L. EVANS: Lela Evans, MHA for Torngat Mountains.

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Caucus.

D. PORTER: David Porter, Official Opposition Office.

N. RYAN: Nathan Ryan, Official Opposition Office.

J. HOGAN: John Hogan, MHA for Windsor Lake.

S. PRITCHETT: Sonja Pritchett, Research Coordinator, GMO.

S. STOODLEY: Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio.

L. DEMPSTER: Good morning, everyone. Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

P. TRIMPER: Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I call for a motion to adopt the minutes of April 12.

Motion is made by MHA Pardy.

Seconder? MHA Forsey.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: I would ask the minister now to introduce himself and we will go through the Committee as well.

D. BRAGG: Derrick Bragg, Minister of Fishery, Forestry and Agriculture.

T. KING: Tracy King, Deputy Minister.

P. IVIMEY: Philip Ivimey, Departmental Controller.

D. ENGLISH: Dana English, Minister Bragg's Executive Assistant.

E. SHEA: Erin Shea, Communications Director.

L. ROBERTS: Lorelei Roberts, Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

S. BALSOM: Steve Balsom, Assistant Deputy Minister, Forestry and Wildlife.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I will ask the Clerk to call the first of the subheads please.

CLERK (Beazley): For the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture: Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.02.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 carry?

Minister, your opening remarks, please.

D. BRAGG: My opening remarks today will be very brief because I know last year we didn't have a lot of time. We have three hours this morning. We have a small but mighty crew around us here, but we have a big department and we cover every inch of this province in this department – whether it is Crown Lands, whether it is Forestry, you name it, we are the ones. We are growing it, we are harvesting it and it is just a wonderful department.

So I am looking forward to the questions from the Members opposite this morning and I don't see any need to prolong this. Let us get into it, if you are ready.

CHAIR: 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

MHA Pardy.

C. PARDY: Thank you Chair.

I was fully expecting, Minister, that you would go over with all of your vacancy and staffing numbers but I would say will all those be in the binder that we will receive?

T. KING: We can give it to you in a binder, yes.

D. BRAGG: So yes, in response to that, as the deputy just said, we can provide that in the binder because if you look through it, every subheading shows the positions and throughout the year some may be vacant, some are not vacant. I think 165 last year would have been the number vacant and then filled. So we can give you an updated number with the binder.

C. PARDY: I was going to tag along –

D. BRAGG: And we will give you the binder at the end of the session by the way.

C. PARDY: Okay. That is good.

Did the Department of Finance indicate your attrition targets for this fiscal? I remember the figures were stated in the Estimates last year as to what the attrition figure was for the past two years.

D. BRAGG: Deputy –

T. KING: So for '22-'23 there is no attrition target. Our attrition for '21, for the total, from 2020 to 2022, was 358,000, but there was nothing further for this year.

C. PARDY: Okay, so you had attrition targets for the past two years but no attrition targets for '22-'23?

T. KING: That's right.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Just another clarification; you stated you have a big department. You've certainly, probably got one of the biggest departments in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have three hours in Estimates. Would it be that if you've got subheadings of three departments, would three hours be adequate to cover it, or would each subheading – ?

D. BRAGG: We feel three hours to be adequate; depending on the amount of questions you guys have, obviously. And what does not come out here, any time if you want to drop by over to the office, we can follow up on any follow-up questions you might have if you don't have enough. So we'll get through what we can here today, and if you have follow-up questions, by all means reach out to us, we'll set up a meeting and we'll work through the rest of them.

C. PARDY: I'm on record – my hon. colleague from Exploits has said: Make sure you're succinct and on point. Sometimes it's a struggle for me, so I'm going to make sure that I'm going to be finished in about an hour and a half so he's got enough time.

D. BRAGG: Okay, well, you've got to think about the other people.

C. PARDY: They've got their due allotment anyhow, right?

D. BRAGG: That's right.

P. FORSEY: They're counted in.

C. PARDY: They're counted in, yeah.

Okay, 1.1.01, in the Minister's Office, the department spent \$15,000 more than was budgeted last year in Salaries.

D. BRAGG: Okay, so that's a variance due to routine salary adjustments.

C. PARDY: Routine salary adjustments?

D. BRAGG: No – variance due to the change in the ministerial executive assistant during the year, and salary difference between the former and current EA. So the former EA and the current EA would have had a different salary structure depending on their time with the province.

C. PARDY: Okay, incrementally as the time.

Transportation and Communications, I'm assuming all the way through COVID this would have been still a factor with the variance there.

D. BRAGG: COVID was a factor and we're hoping to get back to pretty well normal this year.

C. PARDY: While only – I shouldn't say a mere because every dollar is significant.

In Purchased Services, \$1,000 more than budgeted was spent.

D. BRAGG: So that was a variance due to higher than anticipated Purchased Services expenditure during the years, meeting expenses – Tracy, can you help me out with that one?

T. KING: In here would be increased cost for meetings that the minister would have had with stakeholders on things throughout the year. So that would have been higher than budgeted.

C. PARDY: Okay. And that during a COVID year?

T. KING: Yes.

C. PARDY: Okay.

T. KING: Also, the minister's first year in the department.

C. PARDY: Okay.

1.2.01, Executive Support: Again, \$160,000 spent less and that is in the Salaries for 1.2.01.

D. BRAGG: The variance is due to the vacancies within the divisions during the year: manager of communications and ADM of enforcement. So we were short an ADM for a while and that is about to be filled now, the new ADM, within the next, probably, two or three weeks.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Again, I am assuming the Transportation and Communications right through the budget is COVID related.

D. BRAGG: Yeah, there was some travel last year but not anticipated what it would have been in a normal year.

C. PARDY: No. And then you bounce back this year to what preCOVID would have been and settle on that.

Purchased Services, last year you spent \$30,000 and this year you budgeted \$10,000. I wonder if you can explain that.

D. BRAGG: So that would have been meeting expenses. Variance due to less than anticipated Purchased Services expenditure in the year are meeting expenses.

I might be on the wrong page, b'ys.

C. PARDY: 1.2.01, Purchased Services.

D. BRAGG: Okay. So this has to do with zero-based budgeting. Sorry about that. The \$28,500 reprofiled from Purchased Services reflects the leased accommodations in Corner Brook for executive travel and requirements for other accommodations when travelling to Corner Brook.

We ended the lease in Corner Brook. We used to have an apartment in Corner Brook for the Executive but now we use the hotel because of the time over there. Before, we'd go over there way more so it made more sense to have the apartment. Now it just makes sense to –

C. PARDY: So you did a costing analysis of that. Last year, I think, the answer to the question was the fact that it was more financially better off to have accommodations than the hotel. So I am assuming there would be fewer trips now.

T. KING: Yeah. Because at that time the ADM of Resource and Enforcement Services was filled, so there were two of us travelling very regularly to Corner Brook. Once that position became vacant, and has been for some time, we ended the lease, because it doesn't make financial sense just for only one person.

C. PARDY: If this ADM is engaged now and hired, will you be going back to –?

T. KING: It will depend. That position is advertised for St. John's or Corner Brook. So it will depend where the position is filled from.

C. PARDY: Good.

D. BRAGG: So if the ADM who is successful is from Corner Brook, they'll be living in Corner Brook and we won't need accommodations there.

C. PARDY: Makes sense.

D. BRAGG: But if they're here in St. John's, well then it's going to be back and forth. We may go back – it depends on how it all works out, because you have to remember two people who use the same apartment have to really co-exist together and be able to cohabitate sort of thing.

C. PARDY: Yes, that's good.

I stated last year that in the Premier's Green report it was clearly stated that the governance structure of the fisheries is not working for the province, and we discussed that last year. I think you talked to a lot of harvesters and other people out in industry about now and they would say the same thing. People that have been in the industry, like the Gus Etchegarys of the world and others, would say the same thing.

If we're all on the same page as that, my question would be for the department: If you believe that is the case, what action has been

taken or is ongoing for us to have a better governance structure? I do realize that the federal government give quotas, but we seem to be blindsided by a lot of announcements being made on the closing of fisheries that we haven't even sat around the table on to discuss, and that is part of the governance structure.

D. BRAGG: So I think you may be a little confused and some of the fisher people may be confused and can't distinguish between the federal component of this and the provincial component of this. I assure you our department is structured as good as you could ever expect to be, and we run like a well-oiled machine.

What you would refer to, of the Gus Etchegarys of the world, they refer to the federal component, in which we have no control over quota allocations or anything like that. We just control it when it comes on the shore. So when it comes on the shore, when it's landed, our job is then the inspection side of it, to make sure that it comes in, it's the quality, it goes to the plant and it's treated right.

We have good resource people in that respect. Last year we were a little bit taxed because we had a lot of our people on points of entry. You would have saw people in Argentia, when the ferry was going there, in Port aux Basques when the ferry was going there and in Labrador. So we were sort of short last year in our enforcement side of it, but absolutely the structure that we have right now, we have no reason whatsoever to provincially interfere with that whatsoever.

C. PARDY: Just clarity on my question. It wasn't anything about provincially as far as the team or as far as the functioning. I know we got our own cocoons of which we're managing the stock. So yes, the federal government got the water, the control of the stock and how it's managed and so on. I know that we've got the land resources, the processing and we do what we can and make sure we do whatever we can on land. But there has got to be a little more of a union between the two to know that one hand knows what the other hand is doing. Even if we sat around the table for these sessions, or nothing to be announced unless we know that your department is aware of it to start with, and probably get an opportunity that before something is released to the media out there, that

you've had a part or are privy to that discussion that would be around the table.

That's all I'm saying. I know there are two distinct entities and that's the way it's set up, but it seems like lots of times that we seem to be settling in at what we do with our land resources and what we do on our land and what happens offshore, we just wait for them to let us know what is happening.

D. BRAGG: One hundred per cent, and that is 100 per cent how it's been since 1949. The feds control the complete quota. They do the science on the quota. We have meetings with them from time to time, but the decision rests solely on the federal government. We take the blame for it from time to time, but any time there's a quota announcement for anything that's offshore it's 100 per cent the feds.

C. PARDY: Yeah, I agree.

D. BRAGG: So I understand what you're saying that yes, it would be great if we could coexist and have a kumbaya sort of relationship, but that has not always been the case. Maybe it's never been the case in the history of Newfoundland. But it's something that we strive for, but still the quota allocations become the full responsibility of the feds. They have all the science on that. We do none of the science offshore.

C. PARDY: No, I agree. I know –

D. BRAGG: We don't have the money for it, to be honest.

C. PARDY: No. The only thing I would say to you is that since 1949, as you state, when we talk about the management of our fishery, we're soon not going to have anything left to process. And I think if you look at a lot, whether it be the groundfish stock, we have 13,000; the haddock, less than a thousand. Then we look at the mackerel; we know where the mackerel is now. It was 4,000, but now it's closed. Capelin, which we don't know where that's going right now. The herring, less than 15,000.

If we did comparisons with Norway and Iceland and some other countries in the global warming phase, then by God, they're booming. But here

we are in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador that we're soon not going to have a lot left to produce. And what's saving our bacon is the shell industry. If something ever happened to the shell industry, then I would say the great fishing Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is going to be in deep trouble.

So that's what I'm looking, that if it's not working and if we look at our quotas and say it's not working, it hasn't rebuilt, then we need a stronger voice that would be within Ottawa to say, listen, there's something wrong with our governance model. That's where the Gus Etchegarys of the world would be. Back then it was overfishing, but I think we need a stronger and a bigger voice in Ottawa.

How it happens – all I'm saying is that I would ask was there a plan, or is there a plan that would say that we're going to try to get a bigger voice in Ottawa on matters that affect us, which we're going to be eventually left with very little.

D. BRAGG: I guess we could debate the fishery here until the full three hours expires.

C. PARDY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: And we can talk about what was done right and what was done wrong. In '92, we went through a moratorium in this province that shut down the whole industry. It caused mass outmigration. If you go back to pre-92 and look at the decisions that were made, you could say it was a little bit reckless and careless because no one really controlled the quotas.

Since that time, I would hazard to say, they're probably erring more on the side of caution and trying to rebuild the stocks. If you looked in your email, the same as I do, you get someone now out talking about herring, and they want to harvest them, but they're smaller than what they've normally have been. Well, let it grow. They're talking about the capelin. The capelin resource what it was now – I'm no scientist but I look out my window and, for years, I would see like 50 seiners in Bonavista Bay and I don't see five today.

So if you look at that – maybe if it was managed better a long time ago, we would be like Iceland or Norway now. Maybe they were way ahead of

us in their ability to manage their quota. But we are in a place now – we cannot overexploit this fishery. You're right; we're living on the crab, bar none. Crab is what's keeping it all afloat right now and everything else is a small part of it. It's a big part of employment when you look at the fish plants and that sort of thing, but we still can't get people to get enough insurable hours on crab alone. So we need a little bit of everything.

But I'm not defending that the feds here, but someone needs to be aggressive in ensuring that the fishery is there for generations and generations to come. I think it's a debate that's going to be ongoing forever. With no science, we can only say we're listening to a certain person with so much experience. But you need more science and you need to listen to the science, because we need it for the stability of this province for years to come.

CHAIR: I'd like to remind the Member that his time has expired.

1.1.01 to 1.2.02, MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

You said you were going to provide the binder to us.

D. BRAGG: Yes.

L. EVANS: Vacancies and staffing numbers will be in the binder.

D. BRAGG: It will be in the binder.

L. EVANS: Okay, because that was one of my general questions there.

Also just to comment on what the previous speaker was talking about, though. If we were able to able to bring questions in to Estimates about quotas and the federal jurisdictions, I am sure we would spend many a day here. The one comment that I always make is: Cutting quotas is really not the sole thing to rebuild stocks. You have to have better science. You actually have to have better interpretation of the science as well. And I think one of the things that is missing is consultation with stakeholders. So Good

comments there, and I know you are at risk of taking up all of the time.

Moving on to 1.2.02, Administrative Support, Professional Services; what was the source of the unbudgeted \$15,000 expense?

D. BRAGG: It is a variance due to professional services expenditures associated with the purchase of an aquaculture vessel during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay. And do you know for whom it was purchased?

D. BRAGG: Pardon me?

L. EVANS: For whom was it purchased?

D. BRAGG: For aquaculture.

L. EVANS: What region?

D. BRAGG: For the whole province.

L. EVANS: For the whole province, okay.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, last year's actuals were \$574,100 over the estimate, yet this year's estimate has increased by approximately \$1 million.

D. BRAGG: So it was a \$500,000 year one to a four-year Salmonier Nature Park boardwalk and trail. So it is enhancements at the Salmonier Line facility. And the storage shed for Corner Brook for the farm equipment.

L. EVANS: 2.1.01, Marketing Development – actually most of my questions were asked and answered previously.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

MHA Pardy, do you have anything left under Executive and Support Services?

C. PARDY: Just one quick question.

You had a merger last year and stated that the forestry and conservation officers – that was

stated. There was a merger of that team. I am assuming that is done and seamless.

D. BRAGG: That was for management side and enforcement side. There is no issue there.

C. PARDY: Okay.

D. BRAGG: And we actively recruit for those positions as one comes open. Enforcement is vitally important for that side of it.–

C. PARDY: I agree.

That concludes, Mr. Chair, any questions I have on that section.

CHAIR: Thank you.

So is the Committee ready for the question?

Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: Can I get the Clerk to call the next set of subheads, please?

CLERK: Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive carry?

MHA Pardy.

C. PARDY: 2.1.01, in Salaries you anticipate \$83,600 in new spending this year?

D. BRAGG: All right, that's the question? Variance due to routine salary adjustment requirements for '22-'23.

C. PARDY: And that is the incremental staging of the way that salaries are set up?

D. BRAGG: Right.

C. PARDY: Transportation and Communications, answered via COVID.

Supplies?

D. BRAGG: Supplies?

C. PARDY: In Supplies you have \$18,000 less was budgeted last year. You spent less than what was budgeted.

D. BRAGG: It would have been COVID. Variance due to less than expected supply expenditure due to COVID is why we spent less last year.

C. PARDY: That's Supplies?

D. BRAGG: That is what I got.

C. PARDY: You spent less than expected as a result of COVID?

D. BRAGG: Supplies, \$6,100; is that is what you're talking about?

C. PARDY: Yes, that's right.

D. BRAGG: Variance due to less than expected supply expenditures due to COVID-19. Yeah, so this would have been the trade shows and that sort of thing.

C. PARDY: All right, good.

Professional Services, under the same heading, if you can explain what is included here and there is a \$61,000 variance between last year's budget and your revised spending.

D. BRAGG: I'm going to turn this one over to the deputy.

T. KING: Our Professional Services here include our market intelligence reports that we would provide to the Fish Price Setting Panel. So certainly, during COVID, when the market was very uncertain, last year we would have done increased market intelligence –

C. PARDY: Okay.

T. KING: – and I think we would have shared those reports with you all fairly regularly. So that's what is the difference there, and then the increase this year is just recognizing we're going to continue some of that increased market intelligence in the out-years.

C. PARDY: Would the market intelligence consume all of those Professional Services? Usually that's from one budget line to another, if not all, the majority.

T. KING: Yes.

C. PARDY: Okay.

2.1.02, Licensing and Quality Assurance: Can you explain the variance between budget 2021 and the Estimate for this year?

D. BRAGG: For the Salaries, \$1.9 million from \$1.8 million?

C. PARDY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: Variance on the \$1.8 million is due to overtime costs associated with COVID-19 points of entry coverage in the Port aux Basques area during the year, and the \$1.9 million variance is due to salary adjustments for '22-'23. Salary funding reprofiled from 2.2.01, Aquaculture Development and Management, associated with the anticipated movement of two positions between the divisions, as well as a reversal of \$170,000 which was reprofiled to 3.2.01, Insect Control, for spruce budworm spray program for '21-'22.

And that's all right here in the notes. So don't worry about writing that down.

C. PARDY: Okay.

D. BRAGG: If I'm reading it, I can guarantee you you'll get it.

C. PARDY: In 2.1.02, Professional Services, again, to look at what's included here, I think last year you might have mentioned it was the Fish Processing Licensing Board meeting?

D. BRAGG: Yes. They had five meetings with 14 applications last year.

C. PARDY: Okay, so we didn't budget enough for the meetings during the COVID stage. We had more meetings of the board last year than what would have been anticipated?

D. BRAGG: Yes.

C. PARDY: Okay.

D. BRAGG: It was five – how many, Lorelei, in a normal year, for the board?

L. ROBERTS: (Inaudible.)

D. BRAGG: So in a normal year, would be a lot less, so maybe one or two.

C. PARDY: 2.1.03 – in Salaries, can you explain the \$60,000 difference between the budgeted salary and the revised salary expenditure for last year?

D. BRAGG: So it was a vacancy during the year.

C. PARDY: Grants and Subsidies – and you don't need to read out all of the grants and subsidies, but I'm assuming they're probably listed in the binder as well, Minister.

D. BRAGG: This is Atlantic Fisheries Fund. It is there and I am just going to tell you this is committed for seven years, this program. In '17-'18, we spent \$1.5 million. Some of this rolls over from one year to the next, because they were approved but the financing, I guess they didn't have their invoice in on time. In '18-'19, \$6.3 million; '19-'20, \$7.2 million; '20-'21, \$5.3 million; '21-'22, \$3.6 million; '22-'23 is anticipated to be \$4.8 million; and '23-'24 anticipated to be \$12.7 million. That's all here for you to study.

C. PARDY: Good.

2.1.04, Salaries, the variance that would be found there.

D. BRAGG: Variance due to vacancies within the division during the year. There was a variance due to routine salary adjustments for '22-'23.

C. PARDY: That's good.

I was going to read an email from a harvester who attended the session with Minister Murray. I know it went into the news at some point in time, where I think after listening to Minister Murray, the harvesters as well as the FFAW, as you know, were concerned about what messaging was given out. In fact the harvester was asked, point blank, are you confident that the federal government supports the fishery? Just simply that was it.

Well, she got back and stated that she was a little confused at the start, and thought she might have been the only one; but when it was over, when she finished speaking, she said the 57 industry reps and harvesters, after communication, all felt the same way.

She had four objectives, which she had stated. Number one was protection of the environment, which nobody would have any issue with; two was reconciliation; three was climate change; and four was marine protected areas. Those were the four – it didn't say anything about the viability of the fishery, but I think in the ensuing conversation that you and the Premier had with them after – what I'm saying is just going by what the CBC or the VOCM declared that you had had confidence in what the federal minister had stated.

Now, you had an opportunity to engage her. I just wondered if you could speak to that, what you gleaned from it, because I think you had mentioned before about the seals, that you she was on board with the issue with the sealing or seal predation. What else would have instilled confidence in what Minister Murray said, knowing that she had spoken to the harvesters and they were pretty well defeated as a result of it?

D. BRAGG: So I guess Minister Murray is going to be like any minister in the new position. She is going to trust the advice of her staff and then sometimes she is going to speak off-the-cuff. I think Minister Murray was called out on that, and she can speak for herself, for her off-the-cuff conversation she had that was outside of what would have been, I'd say, put to her – it would have been her beliefs because, as we all know, she is a strong environmentalist by nature, like full stop on that.

But in this industry, I guess, when you are up to the speaker – same as me, like any minister – sometimes you say things that you want to get out for your own personal feelings, not really the feelings of the department. So when we talk to her, we talk to her about the importance of the fishery. You cannot downplay the fishery for this province at no point nor time. It is number one. It is the biggest employer in this province. It is a billion-dollar industry last year, not to be underestimated by anything else, and it is the future of our rural communities and will sustain them for years to come.

So we did have a conversation with her. Some of the comments in that conversation will always remain private with the Premier, myself and her. But I have had a follow-up conversation with her as well. That's the questions you are going to have to address to her. So you should probably reach out to her from time to time and email and check with her on anything you don't agree with. Same as the fishermen. From my thoughts – the word was that it was a great meeting. The final comment that she made was it was a great meeting and that blew it all out of whack.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

D. BRAGG: Time up?

CHAIR: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

MHA Evans.

I recognize MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Yes, I was just waiting for the light.

CHAIR: That is why I repeated it.

L. EVANS: Okay.

1.2.02, Administrative Support.

D. BRAGG: 1.2 – we are moved past that, right?

L. EVANS: Oh, sorry about that.

2.1.01, Marketing and Development: Under Purchased Services, last year actuals were \$97,000 under budget, yet this year the Estimates has decreased by \$40,000. Can we get an explanation for that, please?

D. BRAGG: Purchased Services, it was a zero-based budget review; \$2,000 reprofiled to Professional Services. Professional Services, \$42,000 reprofiled from within division, and Purchased Services, \$40,000 reprofiled to Professional Services. I'm sure that made perfect sense.

L. EVANS: And you're reading so that's going to be in our binder?

D. BRAGG: Oh definitely. I tell you if it comes out of these lips and you see me looking down, it's here for you to read after.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Like I said, I've been getting quite distracted by the information, just trying to track things to make sure that I'm not repeating what was previously asked.

Still under 2.1.01, Marketing and Development, Property, Furnishings and Equipment; last year the actuals were \$7,600 under budget. Can we get an explanation for that?

D. BRAGG: You're talking about the \$9,000. Variance due to the purchase of laptops during the year for new hires as well as replacement of two chairs. I guess we had to buy more laptops because more people worked from home. We had to make that allowance for people, and sometimes people needed a chair to work from home. I guess you can call that extra expense due to COVID adaptation in the workplace.

L. EVANS: Okay.

2.1.02, Licensing and Quality Assurance: Under Transportation and Communications, last year's actuals were \$27,400 over budget.

D. BRAGG: So the \$113,000 you're talking about, right?

L. EVANS: Yes.

D. BRAGG: Variance due to overtime costs associated with COVID-19, especially in points of entry such as Port aux Basques during the year, and a variance due to no conference registration fees would also be in there. Also, included in that is variance due to higher than anticipated travel. When we had points of entry, we had to have people actually travel across the province to these points of entries and needed accommodations, so that's why there's extra money there.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under the same heading, Purchased Services, last year's actuals were \$5,000 over budget.

D. BRAGG: That's \$24,000 so that we're clear, right?

L. EVANS: Yes.

D. BRAGG: Variance due to higher than anticipated purchased services required during the year, meeting room rentals for the Fisheries Licensing Board. They had five meetings last year and 14 applications. Again, it had to be bigger rooms to allow for the six feet and all that sort of thing.

L. EVANS: Okay.

Property, Furnishings and Equipment, last year's actuals were \$9,200 over budget.

D. BRAGG: Okay, and that's \$13,000 in the budget. Variance due to the purchase of laptops during the year for the new hires and current hires as well. That's again dealing with the COVID.

L. EVANS: Right.

2.1.03, Atlantic Fisheries Fund – under Grants and Subsidies, I think you answered this but I wasn't quite sure. I didn't really understand some of the stuff you were saying. Under Grants and Subsidies, last year's actuals were \$368,000 under budget. This year's estimate has increased by \$4,498,300. Is this money from a previous year that was not spent and is now being rolled over into this year? I heard the words "rolled" when you were talking, but I wasn't quite sure.

D. BRAGG: So that has to do with Atlantic Fisheries Fund. It is the seven-year program that rolls over and is due to expire in 2024. What is spent each year is rolled out earlier, but it is here written down.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

2.1.04, Sustainable Fisheries Resources and Oceans Policy: Are there any plans for you to partner with DFO to study the seal population and its impacts to our fisheries? And if not, is there something the department could do on its own or contract out to scientists?

D. BRAGG: I talked to your MP in Ottawa a couple weeks ago and MP Jones has assured me that the federal government has done a study. It should have been released this week, so I anticipate and I look forward to the release of that study on the seals over the next week or two. So we'll see where it goes from there, but she was pretty encouraged by it.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

2.1.05, Coordination and Support Services: Under Grants and Subsidies, there is no money spent last year. When was the last time somebody availed of the money from this particular fund?

D. BRAGG: So that is a fund in case a fish plant closes; that is \$500,000 that is earmarked. If you are familiar with CEEP funding that you would get in a year, this is a fund set up solely if a plant burned or shut down during the season (inaudible) for employment –

OFFICIAL: Permanently.

D. BRAGG: Permanently closed, yes. So burned down would be a good example of that. I know that happened in Twillingate a couple of years ago. It happened on the Northern Peninsula another time when a plant burned down. Nothing happened last year; hopefully nothing happened this year – knock on wood.

L. EVANS: Okay, so it is like a reserve in case people need to get –

D. BRAGG: It is. It is there just in case.

L. EVANS: To help people get their EI, sort of.

D. BRAGG: Right. And it is a one-year funding for that particular municipality.

L. EVANS: Has the government explored any new ways of keeping processing plants open, such as allowing plants to process more species of fish, or by making it easier for harvesters to set up and incubate their own processing plants?

D. BRAGG: So we have the Licensing Board in which people would apply to, and I know currently there was five, if not six, applications went to the board about a couple weeks ago. Plants, right now, get to utilize, I guess, and process whatever they can get their hands on, to be honest.

Last year there was an abundance of squid comes to mind, and I know fishermen were put on a quota of 9,000 pounds a day in my area. So if the capelin come and capelin stocks are good, they process what they can. If herring are good, they process what they can, what they can catch until the quota's caught.

But we are not at our maximum in codfish, the staple of this province; we are not at our maximum. We do not catch the allocation of cod, nor do we process it all, which is unfortunate. I think it's like 60 per cent may have been caught last year of the cod quota. Don't hold me to 60 per cent, but it was nowhere close to 100 per cent. In crab we were like almost 100 per cent if not over 100 per cent, but in the groundfish we were not. We could have been.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

What about redfish? Has there been any progress on looking into the harvesting process of redfish?

D. BRAGG: So redfish right now, I'm told, will give you about a two-ounce fillet, if you caught it right now, so basically it would be a baitfish. When redfish matures, I think it's 30 centimetres, so that's about a foot long, would be the ultimate size for it. Then we're going to be ready for it, but that could be a couple of years out.

We hope that there's not a gap between redfish and the shrimp. Because the more redfish, the less shrimp. Of course they're eating the shrimp. Don't need to be a scientist to know that; every fish has to eat some other source of fish in the ocean, and they always usually eat what's smaller.

So redfish is something that we look forward to, but redfish, and to MHA Pardy's question, is something that needs to be closely monitored because I thought they said it's about a 30-year fishery once it starts, you can anticipate. Then it's going to fall off the face of the earth, and then for some unknown reason it disappears and comes back again, and that's been the history of that.

I get that information mostly from a producer on the West Coast, Bill Barry, who's very knowledgeable in that fishery because he's spent 50 years in the fishery, so he understands the cycle of the redfish. So local knowledge and science knowledge is what we need to keep the redfish whole. And it's a Gulf fishery, by the way. It won't be off the East Coast of Newfoundland; it's basically a Gulf fishery.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

2.1.06, looking at the Seal Product Inventory Financing. Last year it was stated that Phocalux was in arrears and that the DGS was going to work on the collection of this particular loan. Any progress made on that, this past year?

D. BRAGG: So, very little on the Phocalux. It's a hard word to say, actually, so it's there if everybody wants to spell it. So the Phocalux plant opened and closed, basically, they owed the province money and we've had no success to date collecting any of that money.

L. EVANS: Okay.

D. BRAGG: So we took it out of ours.

L. EVANS: Yeah.

2.2.01, Agriculture Development and Management. I'll just get one other question in under Salaries. Last year's actuals were \$160,000 under budget, and this year's estimate

has been decreased by \$139,000. Can we get an explanation of this?

D. BRAGG: So under Salaries, variance due to two positions that were originally budgeted under 2.2.01, Agriculture Development, have been located in 2.1.02, Licensing and Quality Assurance Division, during the year. And there's a variance there due to the salary adjustments for the '22-'23 salary funding reprofiled to 2.1.02, Licensing and Quality Assurance, associated with an anticipated movement of two positions between the divisions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I remind the hon. Member that her speaking time is expired.

2.1.01 to 2.3.01, back to you, MHA Pardy.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

Could we get the figure on how much of the cod was harvested, how much of the quota. I think it's higher than that number, but I stand to be corrected.

D. BRAGG: I will go to my ADM, Lorelei. It'd be a guesstimate right now at best, to be honest.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

L. ROBERTS: It's not a number that I could provide you right off the top of my head. But I do know that in terms of what was harvested, it was significantly below what the quota was. Just opportunity cost. Most people chose to fish other species, and there's an overlap with cod, too, with the way the seasons work. So that tends to mean that more people will pick the more lucrative, the crab or the lobster, rather than fish the cod.

C. PARDY: Yeah, understandable.

When MP Jones had stated that the report that she was expecting, we would be pleased with it, I'm assuming she's referring to the Atlantic Seal Science Task Force?

D. BRAGG: I'm assuming so.

C. PARDY: Yeah, that's the ...

D. BRAGG: Yeah.

C. PARDY: I would expect that would show the same thing as past reports.

D. BRAGG: I don't expect to be surprised by anything.

C. PARDY: No, whether it be the 2012 Senate report on seal predation, it'll state the same.

D. BRAGG: But it'll get the conversation moving on the seal fishery where it needs to be, to be fair.

C. PARDY: The redfish predate on what? Do they not eat shrimp?

D. BRAGG: Yes.

C. PARDY: So the redfish eat shrimp?

D. BRAGG: Yeah.

C. PARDY: I stated last year that I spoke with a Quebec fisherman. Around his feet were about eight empty gas cans in the inner harbour in Bonavista. So I pulled in with my truck, thought he may have been a constituent, and nothing wrong with even if he was travelling down there in Bonavista, but I offered did he need a hand. So I ended up bringing him with his gas cans and he made the journey down.

But he said in Quebec they were concerned about the redfish biomass, because they know that it's going to deplete the shrimp, which they were getting a much bigger return on. I know that when we look at our industry we're talking about they're underdeveloped. We wait (inaudible) see the size of the fillet as you had answered my hon. colleague. But he was professing that it was a different approach in Quebec, because they were concerned about the predation of the shrimp.

I know where we are now, if you think about it, we're talking about a gulf redfish, and now we look at with the shrimp in the gulf and well, I just wondered is one effecting the other? I know that's where science comes in, or the Bill Barry. I'm not sure what Bill Barry would say in the –

D. BRAGG: Yeah.

C. PARDY: But anyway I just throw that out there, because I know that for me, I was thinking that was a whole different paradigm shift than when I spoke to the industry players, because they were looking at down the road too early to harvest, where this Quebec fisherman was saying, well, there's more to it than that.

2.1.06, Sealing, when did we stop giving grants to the Canadian Sealing Association? At what point in time did we stop? Do we contribute now to the Canadian Sealing Association?

D. BRAGG: I'll turn that back to the ADM, Lorelei.

L ROBERTS: No, we don't contribute to the Canadian Sealing Association. We don't provide, actually, funding for core funding for any groups. In terms of sealing associations, we do work with those groups in terms of developing markets and things like that, under the Canadian Fish and Seafood Opportunities Fund, but no we don't provide a grant of any type.

C. PARDY: I think government once did, did they not? Again, I ask and I don't know the answers. That's why I ask.

L. ROBERTS: Certainly not in the time that I've been with the department.

C. PARDY: Okay. Yeah.

D. BRAGG: Can I give you some interesting seal numbers before you go on? For the kills? While you're looking for the next question.

In 2012, it was 60,000 seals harvested. In 2013, 95,000. You don't need to write this down, because I have it all here for you. In 2014, it was 59,000. 2015 was 35,000. In 2016, 66,000. So even in the height of it we weren't harvesting enough seals. In 2017, 80,000, almost 81,000. In 2018, 59,000; 2019, 32,000. In 2020, we took 395 seals. And 2021, 26,000.

So I will anticipate this year is going to be just as well as what it was last year. Yeah.

C. PARDY: Has the department reached out to look at interested parties or groups that may be

looking at doing something within the sealing industry that we can, at least, come close to catching our quota? Have we reached out to groups in Labrador? Have you been in discussions with the Tors Cove proposed proponents?

D. BRAGG: So I have been in Tors Cove and I went though the proposed plant they have there. The trouble with seals is always going to be, and has been, the markets. The problem is one year it is the fur; one year it is the fat and the next year it is the meat. It could be organs. It has been all over the globe, the sealing industry has been, for the last 20 years, to say the least.

We just need to find some stable market to control and we need a market, actually, that takes off the old seals, because the young seals, as you can tell from this, all of that what I read you would have been mostly the young beater seals, which would only have been about a month old. So we are not even touching the old-seal population at all. But we are hoping for a conversation any and every day of the week on seals, to be honest. Anybody who has got a great idea on the seals, bring it forward.

C. PARDY: We probably need to be initiating something, knowing what an impact it was on the history. We should be initiating, I would think.

Doug Swain, DFO fish biologist, says that "the cod population is now about five per cent of the levels in the 1980s, and the downward spiral is accelerating despite a moratorium on a directed cod fishery in the Gulf" of St. Lawrence "since 2009." Quote, he said "We've observed that the grey seals continue to forage in the vicinity of these cod aggregations, that cod comprise a very high proportion of their diet in these times and places."

Jane Adey had a gentleman on that I think he had stated – I should have recalled his name but it was a scientist on – had stated that they weren't aware of the grey seals pupping on the island. But I have since heard others to confirm that they are. And that would be something new, I think, for the province, that they pupped here.

Usually Sable Island was their pupping ground, whereas now they are on the coast.

The only thing I would say is that we talk about the numbers I gave out about the stocks that we have, that rural Newfoundland depends on, that the Province of Newfoundland gets their \$1 billion from, which I would state unequivocally we ought to be getting in \$5 billion to \$10 billion, not just a mere one billion. The seals are the ones that we can control, that we can do something about with an action. There is no doubt about that.

Here's Doug Swain saying that eventually it's going to come a point in time that we could have an extinction of a species which he, being a fish biologist in DFO, is stating that we've got a big issue. You ask do any harvester on the Bonavista Peninsula, without exception, everyone will say big issue. Bill Barry who you've been talking to, I guarantee you, which I never met the man, but I would think that Bill Barry would say the same thing from an industry perspective.

The only thing that's contingent on us, to make sure that we take action on the sealing to make sure that if it's not happening in our province, then we need it to happen. Norway is not concerned on the marketing – that's what I hear. Bob Hardy would often say they're not so concerned on the markets. They're concerned on making sure that they keep the ecosystem in check and the seal predation is kept minimized so that they can get their funding and their harvesting and the money from the other fish stocks.

So the only thing I would say under the sealing section, it's empty – as my hon. Member had said, when we look at what we've got here, the seal product inventory financing, we're pretty well – it's a placeholder or we'll put a placeholder there eventually, but there should be a lot more there that we, as a province, are doing to tackle the seal predation issue. Not trusting for industry to combat the economics of it all, but I will just close on that one.

CHAIR: Minister, do you want to comment on that before I go to the other –?

D. BRAGG: Yes, I dispute and I guess I question how we're going to go from a \$1-billion industry to a \$5-billion industry based on what you said on eliminating the seals. We went to the billion dollars because the price of crab went from \$2.50 to \$7.69 basically is what got us to \$1 billion dollars. That's why we got to a \$1 billion last year.

To go from \$1 billion in the fishery to \$5 billion, if we extinct the seals completely I don't know how the stocks rebound, how we harvest and how we find the markets to that. So I don't know where your science is based on that or where your information comes from. Anything you have there, I look forward to that.

Again, on seals, I am open every day of the week to a conversation on seals. It's all right to say we should do something; we need to know what we need to do.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

2.1.01 to 2.3.01, MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Public engagement on foreign ownership in the fish-processing sector concluded February 4. Does the department have a timeline on when we can expect a final report on the foreign ownership review?

T. KING: So to your point, MHA Evans, the consultations have concluded on foreign ownership. We've got a draft report, so I am hoping to have something in front of the minister very soon on that so that we can release the results in the near term.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Moving to 2.2.01, Aquaculture Development and Management: Under Professional Services, last year's actuals were \$20,000 over budget; can we get an explanation of that?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to professional services required for the fairness advisor for the Bays West project during the year.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

2.2.02, Aquaculture Capital Equity Investment: Under Loans, Advances and Investments, last year is zero, but it was allocated out as \$6.5 million. This year's estimate has been reduced down to \$100 placeholder. So can we get an explanation for that?

D. BRAGG: That is just a placeholder for future years.

L. EVANS: Okay.

So the \$6.5 million that was allocated last year, was that just a placeholder too?

T. KING: So this was \$6.5 million that had been budgeted for the aquaculture capital equity agreement with Grieg and I think we will have seen last year they didn't need to draw down that funding and things changed in the program. We're in negotiation with the company about the future of their ACEP and what that looks like after some changes so we won't need any funding for that this year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

2.3.01, Aquatic Animal Health: How many escapes have there been in the past year from open pens and how many fishes escaped in each incident?

D. BRAGG: So we had one major fish escape last year and it was a landlocked facility down, I'll say, around Seal Cove, down the Connaigre Peninsula. An otter chewed through a net and there was 200,000?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

D. BRAGG: (Inaudible.)

Was that salmon, or was it trout that time?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

D. BRAGG: Yeah, it was landlocked. The pond it was in, if you ever drove down there, it's right by the side of the road; they use it sometimes while they're waiting to harvest the fish. I can't be 100 per cent sure if it's steelhead trout or if it was salmon, to be honest, because that was last

year when that happened. But an otter chewed through the net and the salmon escaped out into the pond.

So basically what they did, they tried to recapture what they could, and then they opened up the pond for anglers. Because what happens, when they say landlocked, there's no way for the salmon to get upstream or downstream because it's all barred off for them. It's a perfect pond for what they need for that job.

I think there was two salmon that made their escape from one of the sites.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

D. BRAGG: Four? Oh, they caught two and two are still on the loose.

L. EVANS: You said one major and some minor, so, just to qualify, you said there was one major escape which was landlocked and minor escapes?

D. BRAGG: Yes, minor escapes would have been a sea pen – I think that was basically they were handling the fish, just looking at them, and it just jumped out of somebody's hands.

L. EVANS: That's happened to me too when I'm taking fish out of the net.

D. BRAGG: But we've come a long way, because the offshore pens now have steel-enforced twine in them. So you need to be more than an otter now to chew into it; you need a pair of wire cutters.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Minister.

Could we have an update on the Integrated Pest Management Plan used to combat the spread of sea lice, please?

D. BRAGG: I'm going to turn this over to my ADM, Lorelei.

L. ROBERTS: Could you repeat the question? I never heard it fully.

L. EVANS: Just an update on the Integrated Pest Management Plan used to control the spread of sea lice.

L. ROBERTS: Okay.

So, what that is, it's a plan where the vets with our department work with the vets of the company's departments, develop the plan how they're going to treat sea lice. So our waters are known for sea lice, particularly after it gets up to about five, six degrees, it's prime opportunity for sea lice to proliferate.

Basically what they do is they look at multiple treatments and, in this province, many companies use lumpfish to treat sea lice. They also use different methods like mechanical methods, where they put the fish through like a warm-water bath and it takes the sea lice off of them. Also like a little scrubber that takes it off of them.

So they've moved away from a lot of, what I'll say, chemical treatments, to more natural-type treatments. But basically each company, depending on where the site is located, with their integrated management plan has a specific plan to deal with their particular salmon population, wherever it is. So it will look different for every single company.

L. EVANS: And do you do inspections to sort of monitor the rates of sea lice?

L. ROBERTS: Absolutely.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

L. ROBERTS: Yeah, we do inspections, and in actual fact when you see the numbers in the budget, it reflects that. Our staff, our veterinarians and our inspectors go out and inspect the nets on a regular basis. Our veterinarians go out and do what we call aquatic health surveillance where they check sea lice. So companies are required to report their sea lice once it gets above a certain temperature, because you can't bring fish up top to count the sea lice because they would die. So you have to wait for the temperature to rise in the ocean to be able to bring them up to count.

And we actually do an audit. We have our vets go out and do an audit so that when we count the sea lice and the company counts the sea lice that we make sure they're getting similar numbers.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

D. BRAGG: I think we should note that all reports of all escapes are reported online. Not sure if Lorelei said that, but if you ever want to know about the escapes, it's all (inaudible).

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Continuing on 2.3.01, I'm still there, Aquatic Animal Health, still in the same section. Under Salaries, last year's actuals were \$50,000 over budget.

D. BRAGG: So variance due to overtime costs associated with the oversight of aquatic animal health reporting disease and mortality events encountered in '21 and '22. So that's overtime.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under Purchased Services, last year's actuals were \$77,200 over budget.

D. BRAGG: Purchased Services?

L. EVANS: Yeah, Purchased Services.

D. BRAGG: Oh, I'm looking at Professional Services, I'm sorry.

Variance due to increased expenditures required for laboratory purchased services due to the ongoing management of aquatic animal health reporting disease and mortality events encountered in '21 and '22.

L. EVANS: Okay, and that's in the book.

Thank you, those are the questions I have for this section.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MHA Parady, do you have anything left in this section, 2.1.01 to 2.3.01?

C. PARDY: I wanted to wish them good luck in catching those two rogue fish in that landlocked pond.

D. BRAGG: I've been at it all winter.

C. PARDY: We're rooting for you.

On a sealing note – and no need for a response – I don't have science to back, but I just look at it and say that if we harvest a commercial harvest of 200,000 metric tons and we yield \$1 billion – if seals are determined by science to eat that every six to 12 days, then I would say just do the math.

So if we are looking at seals eat and consume what we harvest in 200,000 – and it might not be totally that linear but by golly one would say – and all you look at is the revenue that Norway and Iceland and those countries that pull in that do not have a seal issue and they struggle with climate change. They struggle with environmental issues, the same as every other country in the world. The big difference would be is that they don't have a pinniped or a seal predation.

The only thing I would say of every species that we have, then the sealing could be an issue. Because if they are bountiful elsewhere, then Doug Swain is probably right, as a fish biologist.

I would say, not based on science, but I just think to look at that, and that is how most people will look at it. That is like the Bob Hardys of the world who would state and it seems quite plausible to me to look at the figures that he would throw out to know that we ought to be doing a lot better in Newfoundland and Labrador than what we are doing and the seal predation is an issue that we should have a much stronger, concerted effort to deal with.

D. BRAGG: I couldn't agree with you more but I will go back to that we need the markets to be able to go out. So it is twofold. We have a lot less fisher people now, a lot less commercial sealers. It is not as simple as that we need to destroy the seals. We need to find a way to harvest the seals. We need to find a way to find harvesters to harvest the seals.

If you look, the first week of April is when the crab season opens; that is when all of the longliners or 99 per cent of the longliners take part in the crab fishery. It is more lucrative; less chance of damage. Going to the seal fishery, I know for a fact because I have been there, the chance of destroying your boat, sinking your

boat or causing major damage is great when you are out amongst those big ice pans.

It may look great on land but once you are out there in a big swell and you eat your heart a couple of times, let me tell you, you would appreciate why people have gone away from the sealing. I mean, we are not going to see the day, I don't think anymore, where you are going to have big ships going out to the seal fishery because it is no longer the whitecoat fishery. That was lucrative in those days.

Now what happens, when it becomes a beater and gets in the water, you have to chase the seal, so they are harder to harvest at a time when everybody wants to take part in the lucrative crab fishery. So it is not just the seals; it's finding the balance of how we put that together.

As we all know, everybody's talking about now they want to get their crab because they're afraid of what might happen to the condition of the shell. Nobody wants to wait until the middle of May to start fishing the crab; they want to get the crab early as possible. It's the better quality; it is a harder shell. Seals are a big conversation that we continue to have. But let's not fool ourselves by thinking there's a rabbit we can pull out of a hat and fix all that. There's about 9 million of them out there by, I guess, a conservative estimate.

Someone said they're growing shorter. Who knows that, I guess, but the seal? But as it sends a small (inaudible) because I have been out there and the seals, I mean you would have seen pictures of White Bay this year. Anybody who don't think seals are a problem has got their head in the sand. Seals are definitely a problem. Seals eat something. I said long before I sat in this chair, seals don't eat chicken. They obviously don't. They eat whatever they can find in the ocean, and I don't think they eat seaweed.

So it's a problem, it's a problem we need to address, but if you look at our numbers, even back from 2012, we weren't doing a good job of catching what the quota was even in them years, or controlling the population. It can only explode, the least number of younger ones you

harvest. We do our moose populations based on studies and surveys and road reports and that sort of thing, but the seals have been left to the north, to move farther to the south.

So yeah, whatever you can say on seals, you're not going to get me to go against, because I'm with you 100 per cent. We need to do something with the seals.

C. PARDY: I was always a big advocate of incentivizing the catch. You've got a line item here under 2.1.06 that's blank. So I'm saying there's ways you can incentivize, that's – I would have been a big supporter of that, but then if I talk to Keith Bath out in the Chair's district, he is certainly a seal harvester. He's just waiting to go out there, and probably is already out there. We've got the Hammonds in my district that go out there. But I think what we need to do, our job as the provincial government is to make sure that we create some markets.

And I know that I've got neighbours in George's Brook-Milton that live alongside me, and they travel down – as soon as the flippers hit the wharf in Catalina, they're driving over an hour to make sure they get their seal flippers. And I'm saying that's in my district. It's almost like there's a demand there that's not being met in the District of Bonavista. I hear about it. I didn't get my seal flippers this year. So there is a market and there is an appetite. It just needs to be nurtured. I don't think the District of Bonavista is unique. It's certainly much similar to your district. I am sure there is a demand for seal products.

If we are talking about nine billion in the world that are going hungry, we have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that can use seal. I can guarantee you that. And we have other markets in the world that we can – because our primary focus ought to be having them out of the water so that the balance in the ecosystem could be found that we can generate revenue to be able to use in all of the things that we have important.

And before now my hon. Member for Exploits gets upset with me that we are encroaching on the time that comes, I am going to have move on.

D. BRAGG: So can I make a comment on what you just said about feeding the hungry with the seals? I mean, that takes quite a bit of work and quite a bit of money. Where that money would come from – you are talking about incentivize. So if we can give a bounty of \$50 per seal, what do we do with it after we give the bounty? What would you do with 300,000 seal carcasses on the wharf in Bonavista, for argument's sake? You can't let it rot. So how do you square the circle to move that seal to feed somebody who is hungry even if they are in St. John's? So you have to process it. You need processing. You need canning or bottling or something or salting. And I don't know whoever eats salt seal, to be honest.

So it is great what you are saying but is it really realistic, is my question. When we think of hungry people we think about Africa more than anywhere; how do we take seals from the wharf in Bonavista, process it and get it to Africa? Who pays the bill? You can't expect that to be the provincial government, to be fair. Because that is a multi-millions alone just to do something like that.

Maybe it might sound great. We say that Sunday: look at the food we hove out; we could feed another family on what we just threw in the garbage. But the actual fact is you are not going to take that and run in Gander with it or go across the bay with it. So I know what you are saying. I know that to be – in our hearts that is what we want to do. But the reality side of it is making that work and making that not so much profitable, but on a break-even. And that would only be if the government did it on a break-even because no company is going to do it on a break-even.

C. PARDY: A little while ago we were talking about billions. You referenced millions. And I am saying if we did a cost-benefit analysis of what you put in and what you get out, it would be interesting. I would say, not only Africa, when you talk about sending food to Africa – I just said we have a bigger market in the District of Bonavista for seal products than I would say that we could increase our catch and satisfy that

market within the District of Bonavista. What do we need for that?

When I say incentivize, I know it is not just per quota and say the \$50 for a catch for a seal. Incentivize means incentivize the industry in some way, whether it be some production component, some processing outfit that would be out there.

You toured Tors Cove. If Tors Cove is going to move and need the seals and if they're going to make the money on the oil, if the pelts are going to be used and the rest returned to powder, I would say, good stuff. That is good stuff, and that is what I'm saying to incentivize and probably the wrong term, to work with it. Would I, right now, with the limited amount that I would know – and I don't have the background as far as incentivize for catch on seals, because I think the benefits of doing it are far greater than the money that you're going to put in.

If the federal government don't see, well, Doug Swain sees it, the fish biologist in DFO. I think you might have referenced that the minister probably knew that there was an imbalance within the ecosystem. It is a bigger picture than just us in Newfoundland and Labrador. The federal government ought to be very involved with that too, because rural Newfoundland and Newfoundland itself, we've got an untapped amount. We settled and we celebrate the \$1 billion, and I firmly believe that it ought to be more.

If that's what the tackling is on the seal predation, that's one I think that we can make headway with but it all begins with the first step, and then the next step. It might seem like to be a bigger journey, but we have to be seen to making that first step on doing something that would be there.

I would say to you, well, I can look at since this government come into power, in 2015, there hasn't been one news release on sealing industry, and if you go back and look at what you have posted on your site, on the government site, then I would say to you, there were umpteen prior to that, in years before, in John Efford's time, which is the same government.

When you look at when he was the minister as far as the press releases that were out, the actions that were taken on seal predation, and on the sealing, travel for markets, established markets.

So all I'm saying is that we just need to be seen that we are taking the first step in an issue that everyone knows that is an issue, and I think you do, too. I think you're fully aware that it is an issue, but we've got to do something about it, not just trust to say too great of an issue that we can't begin.

CHAIR: Thank you.

D. BRAGG: Can I respond to that, Mr. Chair?

CHAIR: Sure.

D. BRAGG: All right.

So what I have to say to that, you can talk about the ability of your neighbours running down for two flippers or three flippers. The seal fishery is much like the food fishery. Anybody can get a licence to go out and harvest six seals. So there's no reason for anybody in this province who wants a seal, who's got a boat, and motor and a rifle, not to go out and harvest their six seals. Bar none, full stop, on that. So there's no reason for anybody in this province not to have seal in their fridge if they wanted it.

What you talked about in the news releases of the John Efford days, that was before there was anything about embargos and trades that we could not export seal products into the US or the UK. So we deal with current market conditions. So in John Efford's day, there were no restrictions. You could put a seal pelt anywhere in the world. You get on a plane now, and try and fly into the United States with a sealskin jacket on; it's confiscated at the border, point of entry. You lose it. If it's a purse, if it's a pair of shoes, they're gone. You cannot bring it in.

We face these trade hurdles when it comes to the seal industry right now. That was never there 20 years ago. You have to look at it, of today's conditions, what it is today. No good to look at 20, 30 years ago, what it was or 40 years ago. You have to look at the world today and what it means.

The picture is still there that we club whitecoats. That's long gone. But if you look at any of the Wildlife Federation, you'll see a picture of a whitecoat. You will not see a beater. You'll see the whitecoat is in that picture. That has not gone out of people's minds. That's what the Hollywood stars went for. That's where we are today, to deal with it.

We're dealing with more than just this province's ability to market. We're looking at a world that probably doesn't want it, for the most part.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

D. BRAGG: It's finding a way where to put it.

CHAIR: Thank you. We'll just leave it there.

If the Committee is ready for the question, shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.3.01 carried.

CHAIR: Can I get the Clerk to call the next set of subheads, please.

CLERK: Forestry and Wildlife, 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive carry?

The Chair recognizes MHA Forsey.

P. FORSEY: I was going to ask a question. I don't know where actually it goes into – if it goes into animal – aquatic animal or not, but the salmon in the river, the inland waters. Do that come under that heading or is it in the wildlife part of it here, which?

D. BRAGG: It's under Wildlife.

P. FORSEY: Under Wildlife.

D. BRAGG: That would be the enforcement.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Just for starters, salmon seems to be on the increase. I'm sure the biologists are after doing their studies. Salmon seems to be on the increase in both the Exploits River and Gander River in the past couple of years. Just wondering in this year's salmon fishery, angling, salmon fishery if there will be an extra tag allotted for that with the rebound of the –

D. BRAGG: I'm going to turn that over to my ADM, Mr. Balsom.

S. BALSOM: I'm not quite sure DFO has released that management information yet, that they have made their final decision. I know they have had the management science committee meetings but I'd have to double check if they've made the final decision on the retention.

P. FORSEY: All right, that's fair; it is only just a question I had there.

Under wildlife, centrefire rifles, again this year in the guide, were banned between mid-September up to December with regard to coyote hunting. I understand the reasoning for it; I really do. It is because you want to control poaching and that sort of stuff. But aren't you giving a little bit of leniency to the predator themselves?

They don't hunt coyotes – they do; I know you're allowed. There is only July, that month, when they're breeding or whatever they're supposed to be doing, but coyotes will breed anytime. So while you're trying to protect the moose from poachers, aren't you increasing the predator – giving the predators a bigger chance to populate rather than being taken and streamlined, the predation on the smaller animals of the moose population.

D. BRAGG: Most of the coyotes that are taken in this province are trapped. Compared to – what's the number?

S. BALSOM: We see the vast majority come in as trapped versus taken with a rifle. Very few are taken during the big game season. Most are taken in the winter and the spring, this time of

year now, is when the rifle hunters seem to do best.

We were getting very few carcasses sent in during the big game hunting season, which led us to conclude that there is not a lot of coyote hunting taking place during the big game season. Licensed trappers are still allowed to operate during that season. A big game hunter is also allowed to take coyotes under a big game licence as well.

D. BRAGG: We did consultations in which we went live online; Blair Adams and myself sat there for two hours. We had like 50 or 60 people registered to ask questions. That was one of the big concerns: small calibre rifles and the poaching, or the suspected poaching of big game animals. In many circles it has been applauded; there have been some people: Why did you take this from us? But in a lot of the circles that we go through, the vast majority has been applauded that we took these out during the actual big game season.

We know how it works. People get a bear licence so they can hunt with their partners. It is not legal, but it happens. That rifle, substituted when the bear season closed and what you would see then a lot of these rifles, people would shoot a moose, cripple the moose, run away and die, and someone else would kill it later on as a big green spot in it and they have to dispose of the animal. So we're going to err right now on the side of caution with that. I would say way more animals are taken by poaching than coyotes.

You have to remember in the fall of the year is when the moose is healthiest. In the spring, you have to worry about the calf. In the winter, when there's a lot of snow, is the moose not being able to move, if the hunter can go back with the rifle then.

But, as the ADM said, if you have a big game licence you can shoot a coyote. You can use your 30-06, 270, whatever you have. There's no reason not to. It was my personal experience from a lot of people I talked to. I don't know if you're a moose hunter or not, but a lot of people out my way, it's a big complaint.

P. FORSEY: My argument to that, really, would be during the hunting season, nobody is going to shoot a coyote. If they have a big game licence on the seat of their truck or while they're walking along or whatever, nobody is going to shoot at a coyote. A moose might be just around the corner, just hid in the woods. They're not going to scare that animal away if they have a chance to get that animal.

Most of the hunting season, even rabbits, is done in the fall of the year. I know there's a nice bit of winter hunt done on rabbits as well, but you have a 12 gauge in the woods with you, on the roads, you see a coyote, with a 12 gauge, that coyote is probably too close. Then you're causing damage to the coyote. It's just a comment to be made there. Do you know what I'm saying?

D. BRAGG: You shouldn't shoot coyotes on the roads, just so you know. Let's be clear on that.

P. FORSEY: Woods roads, I'm talking about.

D. BRAGG: Same thing.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

From the woods road, okay.

D. BRAGG: Off the woods road, preferably.

P. FORSEY: Off the roads road. But anyway, that's the general comment. Most hunting is done in the fall of the year, when all the guns and everything is being carried, yet I still think you're giving leniency to the predator. That's just a comment.

D. BRAGG: Okay.

P. FORSEY: 3.1.01, Salaries, the revised budget spent \$80,000 less salaries to plan the budget 2021. Additional \$99,000 allotted to spend this year.

D. BRAGG: So the variance was due to vacancies in the division during the year for the \$2.6 million. And the variance was due to routine salary adjustments would be the \$2.8 million.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Transportation and Communications, I guess that's the same thing, COVID issues again?

D. BRAGG: Yeah, and you have to keep in mind, too, some of our people then were on points of entry.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Supplies – spent \$10,000 less on Supplies than anticipated, but anticipated spending \$7,700 more this year.

D. BRAGG: So get up to the \$53,000 from the \$34,000, you mean?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: All right, variance due to less than anticipated supply expenditure during the year primarily due to COVID-19 and lower than anticipated fuel supply. So we're hoping to get back to where we were in previous years, and we know there are adjustments. We're even up from the \$44,000. So \$53,200 we feel is going to be accurate or close for this year.

P. FORSEY: So what kind of supplies would you –?

D. BRAGG: ADM.

S. BALSOM: Yes, the increase that we're seeing this year, we have \$8,600 as being reprofiled from the compliance division into this subhead because the industry services group is taking on the responsibility for administering the load slip books that are used in the transportation of timber. So this was just an increase based on that program moving from one division to another.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Purchased Services were \$55,900 more than expected last year. Why was this?

D. BRAGG: I don't know what Remsoft is, so do you want to go with this?

S. BALSOM: Under this subhead we have the strategic planning section which does the wood

supply calculations for the province. They use a software program that's provided by Remsoft. We had some turnover within that unit. New foresters were hired and we had to provide additional Remsoft software training, and that's only direct from the company. So that was some of the increased cost there.

We also did some survey work for a dock in Cartwright, Labrador, which we're looking to make a decision on. That's currently owned by the department. We also took on a royalty rate review contract. We're working with the industry association. It was an area that they felt the industry should have a review. So we took on a contract there. So that was the increase from \$41,000 to \$97,000.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Does the minister expect a similar discrepancy this year with \$46,000 allotted for this year?

D. BRAGG: No, it should be good.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Operating Accounts: The department spent \$17,900 less than planned in 2021, yet plans to spend \$8,600 more this year. Can you explain the extra spending?

D. BRAGG: Operating Accounts – I'm going to turn this to Tracy King.

T. KING: The Operating Accounts, I mean we've talked about the changes throughout, because these are just the additions of the Transportation, the Supplies and the Professional and Purchased Services discrepancies that we've already talked about. So, you know, travel budget goes back to normal; for next year, we anticipate the Purchased Services. We've just spoken about those things, so that's just the tally of the variances we've just discussed.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive, MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

3.1.01, Administration and Program Planning: Under Professional Services, you had \$200 of unbudgeted costs. What kind of professional services do you get for just \$200?

D. BRAGG: I won't give you the response I had that came quickly. I was thinking it was a checkup from the doctor for \$200, but it's a variance due to requirements for medical documentation during the year related to the integrated disability management program. So it is a doctor's certificate, really.

L. EVANS: Okay. It's just where it wasn't budgeted, and it's such a low number.

Thank you.

D. BRAGG: And it's a good deal.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under Grants and Subsidies, this year's estimate has decreased by \$218,700. What accounts for this decrease?

D. BRAGG: So in Grants and Subsidies for '22-'23, there's Labrador Innu and Metis management agreements, \$100,000; forestry research, \$129,000; Newfoundland and Labrador Lumber Producers' Association, \$75,000; FP Innovations, \$20,000; Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, \$13,200. There's RISI, Resource Information Systems Inc., \$14,000; equity research membership, \$10,200; Atlantic Woodworks program, \$47,000.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under section 3.1.02, Operations and Implementations, under Salaries last year's actuals were \$180,000 over budget, yet this year's estimate has decreased by \$54,000.

D. BRAGG: So last year was variance was due to overtime expenditures associated with points of entry; southwest Newfoundland disaster support; increased wildlife control on the Island portion of the province for avian influenza and rabies; as well as out-of-province deployment for fires at Red Lake, Ontario during the year. This year there is going to be a variance due to

the routine salaries adjustments required for '22-'23.

L. EVANS: I have noticed that there have been several times now where we have paid overtime for points of entry.

D. BRAGG: Sure.

L. EVANS: It did actually increase our costs.

D. BRAGG: A hundred per cent; it cost us a fortune.

L. EVANS: I don't know if this is the place to ask it here. It increased overtime, but did it impact our job performance?

D. BRAGG: Job performance? What do you mean? Because we were at point of entry so the job performance there would have been outside the normal enforcement, so I'm not sure what you're referring to.

L. EVANS: It would be outside normal enforcement so was it taking away from their regular jobs?

D. BRAGG: A hundred per cent, because it was the same people that we would have enforcing the wildlife regulations were at points of entries or fishery regulations were at points of entry, so yes.

L. EVANS: Exactly.

D. BRAGG: But what do you do? It was the lesser of both evils. And our people were most ready to respond with the certifications.

L. EVANS: And thank you.

Supplies, last year's actuals were \$20,000 over budget; can we have an explanation for that?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to higher than anticipated expenses related to PPE and related to the avian influenza, as well as required safety equipment for trucks.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under Purchased Services, last year's actuals were \$74,800 over budget. This year's estimate

is increased by another \$26,600; can we have an explanation?

D. BRAGG: On Purchased Services, right?

L. EVANS: Purchased Services, yes.

D. BRAGG: All right.

Variance due to higher than anticipated expenditures associated with wildlife control equipment, ATV and snowmobile repairs during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Section 3.1.03, Silviculture Development: Under Salaries, this year's estimate has increased by \$153,600; is this a new position being added?

D. BRAGG: So this is salary adjustment required for '22-'23 reflection of an additional \$150,000 related to a two-year federal-provincial cost-shared initiative. It's two positions.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under Purchased Services, last year's actuals were \$200,500 under budget. This year's estimate has increased by \$1.2 million?

D. BRAGG: So that's the \$1.4 million up to \$2.8 million?

L. EVANS: That's under Purchased Services, yes.

D. BRAGG: Okay. A variance due to lower than anticipated expenditures during the year, as some silviculture contracts were not completed due to the labour shortage. We actually didn't get trees planted because we couldn't find the people to do it.

L. EVANS: Under Property, Furnishings, and Equipment, last year's actuals were \$25,000 over budget.

D. BRAGG: So it was a variance due to higher than anticipated equipment requirements during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, probably laptops.

Under Revenue - Federal, what was the source of the expected \$650,000 in federal funding?

D. BRAGG: It's a cost-shared initiative. That, I guess, goes with the Salaries above – this is the revenue down here, looks to be. Federal revenue is related to a two-year federal-provincial cost-shared initiative.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Moving on to the next section 3.1.04, Resource Roads Construction. Under Professional Services, no funds were spent last year. Can we have an explanation of that?

D. BRAGG: Professional Services variance due to no requirements for professional services, for example, with structural engineers for large steel bridges during the year related to Resource Roads Constructions.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Purchased Services, last year the actuals were \$85,000 over budget. Can we have an explanation for that?

D. BRAGG: The variance was due to higher than anticipated Purchase Services expenditures for the year associated with Resource Roads Construction repairs and maintenance, more washouts and points put in due to the weather. So weather events would have caused more washouts and we had to respond to it.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, what was the source of the unbudgeted \$82,800 expense there, and what are the plans for the newly budgeted \$250,000?

D. BRAGG: So I can give it to you for the \$82,800 and I'll turn the \$250,000 over to Steve. The variance for the \$82,800 was due to requirements of fuel equipment for new hires and replacement of ATVs during the year. I'll look to Mr. Balsom for an explanation on the \$250,000.

S. BALSOM: If you look under Property, Furnishings and Equipment for the '22-'23

estimate, we're reprofiling \$250,000 from Supplies down into this category to match the operational requirements under zero-based budgeting this year.

L. EVANS: Okay. Thank you.

Moving to the next section, 3.2.01, Insect Control.

Would you have an update on what work has been done in the past year through the spruce budworm spray program?

D. BRAGG: I am going to turn this over to Mr. Balsom because he is going to give you a more fulsome answer than what I have in my notes.

S. BALSOM: Included in the Estimates binder is a good outline of the spruce budworm overview. I am wondering: will that suffice?

L. EVANS: Yes. That should be fine. Thank you.

Loves that binder.

Moving on to Salaries. Last year's actuals were \$5,000 over budget. Can we have an explanation for that increase?

D. BRAGG: Are we talking 3.2.01?

L. EVANS: Yes, I am still under Insect Control, 3.2.01.

D. BRAGG: Okay. So Salaries?

L. EVANS: Yes.

D. BRAGG: So the variance is due to routine salary adjustments for '22-'23 for \$424,000, and the \$423,300: variance due to slightly higher than anticipated salary expenses during the year related to the Spruce Budworm Early Intervention Strategy Treatment Program.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

I am still under the same section. Under Transportation and Communications, last year

the actuals were \$177,500 over budget. Could we just have a brief explanation of that as well?

D. BRAGG: So the variance on the next four subheadings, I guess, would be variance due to realignment of spending associated with the spruce budworm spray program within the operational accounts. Spray services were provided by Forest Protection Limited and expenditures were primarily captured under the Purchased Services and Transportations and Communications during the year, versus Supplies, where the funds were originally budgeted.

Tracey is going to add to that – the DM.

L. EVANS: Okay.

T. KING: Thanks, Minister.

I just wanted to note here that the insect spray program is a partnership with the federal government. So we do our best to figure out who is going to pay for what at the beginning of the year, but sometimes that changes. So that is just a little more colour to what the minister had described. It was just in the end the feds picked up different things than we anticipated at budget time last year.

CHAIR: Thank you. And I remind the hon. Member that her speaking time has expired.

And before we go back to MHA Forsey, we are going to take a five- or six-minute break to give people an opportunity to –

D. BRAGG: Water up.

CHAIR: – water up and use the facilities.

D. BRAGG: Or water out.

CHAIR: You got it.

Recess

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

We're back. We're going back to MHA Forsey, 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive.

P. FORSEY: 3.1.01, Grants and Subsidies: The category is down to \$218,700 from 2021. What's the reason?

D. BRAGG: I must be on the wrong page, 3.2.01?

P. FORSEY: Yeah, we're back to –

OFFICIAL: 3.1.01.

D. BRAGG: I'm a full page ahead of you.

P. FORSEY: Yes, you are.

D. BRAGG: Grants and Subsidies, Forest Engineering Research Institute of Canada, FERIC, \$18,000 required to maintain corporate membership; Canadian Woodland Forum, CWF, \$600 required to maintain corporate membership. That's \$18,600, right?

OFFICIAL: \$218,000.

P. FORSEY: \$218,000.

D. BRAGG: What? In Grants and Subsidies?

P. FORSEY: The category is down \$218,700.

D. BRAGG: I'm on the wrong page altogether.

P. FORSEY: 3.1.01.

D. BRAGG: All right, I'm on point 04. When we get to it, that's the answer. I didn't know we were going backwards.

Grants and Subsidies, so it's \$627,408? That's where we're to, right?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: So it's a Labrador Innu and Métis forestry management agreement is \$100,000. Forest research, \$120,000 – you weren't paying attention when the Member asked the question. Newfoundland and Labrador Lumber Producers' Association, \$75,000; FP Innovations, \$20,000; Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, \$13,200; RISI Resource Information Systems Inc.,

\$14,000; equity research membership, \$10,200; Atlantic Woodworks program, \$47,000.

P. FORSEY: Okay. We'll take it.

D. BRAGG: I hope you wrote that down because I just (inaudible) out of the binder.

P. FORSEY: I did so. I'm waiting on the book. Apparently there's a lot in that book.

Caribou: I was going to go ask you a question on caribou. I'm getting a couple of outfitting camps in our area, especially in the Mount Peyton area. They've requested one caribou licence extra per year; I don't know if this comes under you, or would this come under environment. I think I tried –

D. BRAGG: So caribou is under us. The outfitting actual licence comes through Tourism; we do the quota.

P. FORSEY: Okay. So would the outfitting camp be allotted – they feel there's an increase in the herd from, say, the Pot Hill herd and the Mount Peyton herd that if they could get one more – just one extra caribou licence.

D. BRAGG: So the caribou, as you know, are being monitored in the province. We have Blair Adams who does probably one of the best – you talk about science, if Blair was on seals he'd be great, but he's on caribou. He gives us where the caribou are, where they need to be and what the quota needs to be. He has a very specific – he can probably give you a presentation sometime on the caribou and moose management, how that's all defined.

So my quick answer to rambling around the bush is going to be no.

P. FORSEY: Okay, fair enough.

We'll get back to Silviculture now: permits and allocations. Just a general question. We're getting contractors in our area that are being denied extra allocations. Is there anything being done regards to those extra allocations for those people?

D. BRAGG: For silviculture?

P. FORSEY: Yeah.

D. BRAGG: I'm going to look over my shoulder to my ADM, since it is a question for that one, and he is going to give you a long-winded answer this time.

P. FORSEY: Don't take up my six minutes.

S. BALSOM: No, I won't be that long winded. I'm not sure the subhead, I think you were referring to commercial cutting permit allocations.

P. FORSEY: Commercial cutting permits, yes, sorry.

S. BALSOM: In the Central districts, 10, 11, 12, those area, we have been, I guess, very fortunate that since Abitibi closed back in 2008, we were looking for a new entrant in the area and it never came to be. We looked at pellet production facilities, sawmill facilities, but the proponents never did – they went through a number or request for proposals and the successful candidates never did develop their proposals. There are a number of reasons and that would be a long-winded answer when we get into the difficulties of running a forest operation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

But what did happen is that the traditional operators there were provided allocations, the contractors that work for Abitibi, there were two sawmills at the time that also would purchase all their fibre from Abitibi, Cottles Island and Sexton Lumber, so all the harvesting contractors and the sawmills were provided allocations to keep their businesses going. Through the natural process of, I guess, the business community, those two sawmills were successful and they grew to a point now where the allocations in Central Newfoundland are primarily allocated. There is no additional timber to give to new entrants or people coming up with new ideas.

Yes, we would love to have the opportunity. We just put a request for proposal out for the Northern Peninsula district where there was unallocated timber. But in order to allocate more timber in the Central districts, we would have to take it away from these businesses that, on their own, invested and grew and are now cutting the full allocation, which is a great success story.

From that has spawned – pressure-treating facilities have moved to the province now and set-up shop and invested. So we have a very integrated industry. They support Corner Brook Pulp and Paper with a flow of wood chips and biomass for their generating facility. They support the agriculture industry with planer shavings and sawdust.

So we're managing the forest industry from a provincial lens. It's difficult to do it at the local lens. But it is a success story for Central all the same that all the wood is getting harvested there and it's creating a lot of value-added products and a very well integrated industry overall.

But, yes, would we love to have more timber to give to new projects, yes. But we can only grow so much and harvest so much in a sustainable fashion. So we can only allocate out the sustainable volume that those districts will provide. We're kind of at that point in those districts, which is, again, a good news story.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, okay, I get your drift, I know where you're coming from, but when Abitibi did go down, some of that forestry was, like you did say, there for the local industry probably to reboot and find another secondary processing, if they could. I know it's been a long time, I realize that.

Now, I know there's been a proposal put to you guys only in the past little while, it's been put on your plate. So how would you entertain that, if there wanted to be another secondary processing industry to be right directly in the forest industry, which is in (inaudible)? Because right now it's just being cut and taken away. People are seeing this everyday.

D. BRAGG: So I guess again you refer to a proposal which you gave me there about probably a month ago.

P. FORSEY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: So our staff will review that, we'll follow up with a meeting, if we need it, with the proponents. Anybody who's serious in this industry, we'll talk to them. We'll be realistic as well, because it's no good for us to build something and we can't supply the timber to it, anymore than to build a fish plant and you can't

supply the fish to it. So we'll take every proposal to be very serious and we will do our due diligence and we'll follow up. And I'm sure on the one in Central you'll do a follow-up with me as well.

P. FORSEY: Yes, no doubt. Anyway, thank you for that.

On the other end of that, you did mention the Northern Peninsula. Timberlands' permits, I'm assuming they're revoked now?

D. BRAGG: Timberlands?

P. FORSEY: Timberlands' permits for the allocation that they had.

D. BRAGG: Oh yes, yes.

P. FORSEY: That should be revoked and done, isn't it, that's over?

D. BRAGG: Yeah. So it was 30,000 cubic metres for the next five years?

P. FORSEY: No, they didn't even cut their first part.

D. BRAGG: Oh no, the one we just proposed.

S. BALSOM: Yeah, you're referring to Active Energy Group.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, that's the one, yeah, Timberlands.

S. BALSOM: They were given a five-year permit to cut 100,000 cubic metres per year on the Northern Peninsula.

P. FORSEY: Two permits, yeah.

S. BALSOM: Yeah, from two different districts that added up to that amount. By the midway point, they had not harvested any or done any start on any kind of facility, so under the allocation policy that we follow their permits were cancelled.

P. FORSEY: Okay. All right.

3.3.01, under Salaries: Why were there \$137,000 more budgeted in 2021?

D. BRAGG: So the variance due to the students and the additional capacity being required at the Salmonier Nature Park during the year for the \$3.1 million. The \$2.9 million is variance due to routine salary adjustments required for '22-'23.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I will remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive.

MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Just a general question here. Last year, two native bat species, the little brown and the northern myotis bats, were placed on the provincial endangered list due to continued presence of white-nose syndrome.

Is the department surveying this issue? Are there plans and programs to sustain the habitat for the bat populations, such as adding the bat houses that seem to be successful in other regions?

D. BRAGG: So we have asked the general public if they come up on a bat colony and they find white nose just to report it to us. Our staff are always actively responding to whatever reports we will get. We're trusting to the general public on most of these because we're not actually out in the bat world but people who are in the bat world can report to us – not to sound like Batman.

L. EVANS: In your press release back in, I think it was 2021, you said, "The province is continuing research and exploring potential habitat protection for these species."

What are you doing in terms of habitat protection?

S. BALSOM: You're correct, we did list the little brown bat under the endangered species listings and from that we have formed a bat recovery team.

So what generally happens once a listing takes place is that a recovery team is formed of local experts and then they will write the management

plan for that species. Included in that will be recommendations on habitat protection. They do have some known locations already across the province that we kind of manage through our current wildlife referral system, but this will now go through the formal recovery team and management planning process. If critical habitat then is listed, it is protected under the *Endangered Species Act* and the legislation that protects it from any, I guess, destruction or any use through the legislation.

So we are under way. There was one virtual meeting held and we have a draft that we are working on currently and that has been circulated with the team for comments. So they are making good progress on that piece.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Under Section 3.2.01, Insect Control, Grants and Subsidies: Last year's actuals were \$2,500 under budget. Can we get an explanation for that? 3.2.01, Insect Control, Grants and Subsidies.

D. BRAGG: So that is subheading 10, right?

A variance due to less than anticipated expenditures for the SERG-I, spray efficiency research group grant for '21-'22. No annual meetings due to COVID in '21 either.

L. EVANS: Okay. Thank you.

3.2.02, Fire Suppression and Communications: Could we have a quick overview and update on our current fire suppression capabilities, the size of the fleet and numbers of the staff available during fire season, et cetera?

D. BRAGG: I am going to turn that over to Mr. Balsom.

S. BALSOM: Just one second, I will find the subhead here.

L. EVANS: It's 3.2.02.

S. BALSOM: So currently under the '22-'23, there are 99 positions under this subhead that are dedicated to fire protection. Within that there are

approximately 70 positions that are dedicated, front-line Conservation Officer I position that are our primary firefighting group. We also have conservation officers then within the regional operations group. It's not their primary role but they are trained and also supplement that group.

We work closely with Air Services. They have the four air tankers that support us. We have a helicopter contract where we use helicopters under contract for support to move personnel and they also bucket water and move equipment and that type of thing.

So we have a very – well, I would say, we have a really good resourced firefighting group. They've been very successful not only here in the province, but we've also been supporting out-of-province deployments through our cross-Canada agreement with the other provinces. We've had deployments that went to Ontario. We had deployments to BC. We had air tankers go to Quebec and assist Nova Scotia, so overall a very successful program.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Keeping with this same heading, under Salaries, last year's actuals were \$592,500 under budget. This year's estimate is increased by \$112,000. Can we have an explanation for this?

D. BRAGG: So the \$1.7 million in Salaries is variance due to less than anticipated salary expenditures associated with the '21-'22 fire suppression activities during the year. The \$2.4 million is the salary adjustment required for '22-'23; reversal of \$100,000 reprofiled to 3.2.01 insect control for the spruce budworm spray program for '21-'22.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Transportation and Communications: This year's estimate has been increased by \$77,400. What was the reason for the increase?

D. BRAGG: So \$77,400 is reprofiled from Supplies, so that's the difference there.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under Supplies, this year's estimate was decreased by \$110,000.

D. BRAGG: So it was reprofiled from within the division.

L. EVANS: So basically just a ...

D. BRAGG: Yeah.

L. EVANS: Under Professional Services, there's a new line for the subsection. What specific services will this line pay for?

D. BRAGG: So Professional Services, \$8,500 was reprofiled from Transportation and Communications for medical services, i.e. fitness testing. So this all got to do with zero-based budgeting.

L. EVANS: Okay.

Under Grants and Subsidies, this year's estimate has increased by \$33,100. What's the reason for the increase?

D. BRAGG: So we reprofiled that from within the division.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under 3.3.01, Wildlife Operations, under Salaries: Last year's actuals were \$137,000 over budget. What was the reason for going over?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to students and additional capacity being required at Salmonier Nature Park and COVID response plans, I have in my notes here as well.

L. EVANS: Okay.

D. BRAGG: And the variance this year of \$2.9 million is due to routine salary adjustments required for '22-'23.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under Purchased Services, last year's actuals were \$65,700 over budget. What was the reason for going over?

D. BRAGG: So the variance was due to higher than anticipated expenditures associated with the

printing and postage for big game licence and salmon tags. And as you would know, this year we're gone online for our big game licences and so we'll save some money this year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Property, Furnishings and Equipment, there was an unbudgeted expense of \$9,900. What was the reason for this expense?

D. BRAGG: So we had to purchase cellphones for our employees and equipment like desks for employees throughout the year. So it was all extra expense. The easy answer to that is COVID; we had to work more outside the office than ever, so we had to make adjustments for that.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

3.3.02, Co-operative Wildlife Projects, under Salaries, last year's actuals were \$50,000 under budget.

D. BRAGG: Variance was less than anticipated salary expenditures under the Caribou Conservation Agreement during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Purchased Services, this year's estimate has decreased by \$15,000: What was the reason for this decrease under the Purchased Services Estimates?

D. BRAGG: So it's a \$15,000 decrease as per planning (inaudible) under the Caribou Conservation Agreement for year four.

L. EVANS: Okay.

And under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, there's an unbudgeted expense of \$2,000. What was this expense?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to purchase of a laptop required for a new hire.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

I just have one further question. Regarding caribou, are there any plans to follow up on the poaching activity from cross-border kills and

transport of caribou that would actually result in charges being laid? Are you making any progress for that?

D. BRAGG: This year, actually, I think the overall – it's not something to be proud of, but it seemed to be that the kills were down; the weather was unusual. We were aware of a group that were inside of our boundaries in Labrador. The problem becomes actually identifying the people.

I mean, we were wondering what to do. I was mad enough last year that I just wanted to go up and spray them all purple, to be honest. So that when they got into Labrador that the officials there could do it. We're working with Labrador officials; we continue to work with them. I have had meetings with the three ministers in Labrador.

Until the feds really bring us together, this is going to – this is a problem that is not new, it has been ongoing. I talked to MHA Trimper a long time ago about this. This has been an ongoing issue for years and years. It is so sad that the herd is almost depleted because of this and people in our own province go without caribou.

L. EVANS: Yeah.

Minister, I think you mentioned Member Trimper as well, but I think we're all in agreement that it is unfortunate. But the feds seem to not want to take any action. Meetings and education is important but we don't have the time for it. The caribou is practically depleted and unless something stops the depletion of the caribou there is going to be no caribou, right. I think we all agree on that.

My time has just expired.

CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

D. BRAGG: So a follow-up to that before we go on.

We cannot condone poaching, anytime, anywhere, within our province, or outside for that matter. I think it comes down to us educating the young people in our communities about poaching not to be there.

A Member opposite, a little while ago, asked about the .22/250. That was taken out to prevent a lot of poaching of big game in the hunting season.

We need to educate each other to this. It is our resource, not to exploit, but we need to protect.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Is the Committee ready for the question?

Shall 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.3.02 carried.

CHAIR: Can I get the Clerk to call the next set of subheads, please.

CLERK: Agriculture and Lands, 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 inclusive carry?

MHA Forsey.

P. FORSEY: 4.1.02, Land Management: Why is there a discrepancy of \$165,000 in this area?

L. EVANS: Could you repeat the line number, please?

P. FORSEY: 4.1.02. Am I correct? 4.1.01, sorry.

D. BRAGG: Oh, I was on the wrong page.

P. FORSEY: Misprint.

D. BRAGG: 4.1.01, subheading –

P. FORSEY: Land Management.

D. BRAGG: Yup. So you're talking Salaries?

P. FORSEY: Salaries, yes.

D. BRAGG: Okay.

Variance due to routine salary adjustments required for '22-'23 will be the \$1.7 million. The reason for \$1.5 million is variance due to savings as a result of vacancies within the division during the year.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

D. BRAGG: That's the \$1.5 million.

P. FORSEY: All right.

Supplies: Why was there an extra \$49,000 in '20-'21?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to higher than anticipated expenditures related to road and bridge infrastructure. We had some major washouts. So it would have been there.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Purchased Services: Why was there savings of \$100,000?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to less than anticipated requirements for roadwork and bridge installation. We just did the repairs, which drove it up but we didn't do any, I guess, new roads.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Revenue - Provincial, there was a discrepancy drop of \$5,358,000 in the provincial revenue in 2021. Can you explain that?

D. BRAGG: So variance due to less than anticipated sale of recreational, residential and commercial lands throughout the province.

I guess like everything, everybody stopped going out, building cabins or whatever. There was less Crown land sold during that year.

P. FORSEY: What?

D. BRAGG: Yes. You don't believe it, I know.

P. FORSEY: All right. Okay.

Speaking of bridges, though. You mentioned bridges just now. This is probably something – Valentine Lake, the bridge going across. Is there an approval done for that one yet? What's the bridge going up Valentine Lake? You know the –

D. BRAGG: I know. So that one is going to be taken out. Marathon Gold is going to actually replace that bridge.

P. FORSEY: Okay. So –

D. BRAGG: So I think it has gone through the environmental assessment process and I think the bridge is on site. It's just when the company gets, I guess, the contractor available to put it in. So it may not be a bailey bridge but it's similar to a bailey bridge. One is coming out and one is going in. I guess they will notify people because there are cottage lots on the other side.

P. FORSEY: Well, the thing is to get it done for their purposes, really, because I know it was going through all of the EAs and one went through Environment, another one Forestry. There was a couple of different areas there.

D. BRAGG: It has passed through all of the hurdles right now. It's just waiting on the contractor and the company to do it when it works for them.

P. FORSEY: Perfect.

Now, Crown Lands itself, there was a backlog back in November probably of close to 4,000 applications being backlogged.

D. BRAGG: No. Where did you get that news?

P. FORSEY: There was some news on that. I did hear some news on that. So that was close to 4,000 backlogged applications in November. Where is the status on Crown lands now with regard to backlogged applications and actually the 90-day reply time is not working. So –

D. BRAGG: Define backlog for me, like beyond the 90 days?

P. FORSEY: Yes, beyond the 90 days.

D. BRAGG: Like, it would have been a year or two old?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: All right. So I'm going to look over my shoulder to my –

P. FORSEY: There you go.

D. BRAGG: – to my DM.

P. FORSEY: You knew it was coming.

D. BRAGG: She's looking through her notes right now.

T. KING: Thanks, Minister.

So right now, the average turnaround time for a routine Crown lands application is 68 business days.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

T. KING: So inside our 90-day –

P. FORSEY: Sixty-eight?

T. KING: Sixty-eight.

D. BRAGG: Business days.

T. KING: Business days, right, inside our 90-day service standard, so –

D. BRAGG: Say it again; say it again.

T. KING: Sixty-eight business days for routine Crown lands applications. Just bear with me because I can't find my notes.

So to date, in 2022, we've received 1,147 applications so far this year. Last year, we received 2,767 applications. So as of today, we have 1,394 applications that are under review with the division with a decision pending.

P. FORSEY: Okay. Back to 68 routine days, what do you call routine?

T. KING: So that would be, you know, a normal cabin development, just a straightforward – most of the things we get in are like that, so your run-of-the-mill thing, everything from a transfer to a new cabin, but it would not include something, say, on Abitibi land. What I would say is 80-plus per cent of our transactions fall in that kind of, just normal citizens doing their regular business with Crown lands.

P. FORSEY: So a 68-day return.

T. KING: That's the average turnaround, right now.

P. FORSEY: Average. Okay.

Okay, good, thank you.

D. BRAGG: No more questions.

P. FORSEY: We can go home.

4.2.01, Salaries: Why is the discrepancy \$100,000 for Salaries? Was there a vacant position?

D. BRAGG: 4.2.01, sorry, I'm one page ahead.

Salaries there is the variance due to routine salary adjustments. That's the \$1.7 million – didn't I just answer this question? \$1.5 million is variance due to results of savings, vacancies in the division during the year.

P. FORSEY: Okay, 4.2.03.

D. BRAGG: 4.2.03, last page?

OFFICIAL: Limestone Sales.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, Limestone Sales.

P. FORSEY: So what about limestone this year? How much will be allocated to farmers?

D. BRAGG: The limestone allocation, as you see the budget line is the same.

P. FORSEY: Yes.

D. BENNETT: We're going to be down actually 35 loads this year because of the cost of trucking.

P. FORSEY: Down?

D. BRAGG: Yes, we're going to be down 35 less loads than last year.

P. FORSEY: So the time frame for lime, with regards to putting it in, will be the same time frame?

D. BRAGG: Yes, it will be the same time frame but, unfortunately, we're going to be down less loads, because of this – now farmers can still go buy it direct, right, but this is under this program. And it goes to people who produce fruits and vegetables first.

P. FORSEY: So Wooddale Road will certainly get their fair portion of this?

D. BRAGG: Wooddale Road?

OFFICIAL: First come, first serve.

D. BRAGG: It's the first come, first serve, yeah.

One would hope that most people can get something out of this.

P. FORSEY: Okay, I'll pass that along.

D. BRAGG: Yes.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

4.3.01, Salaries: Why were actual salaries \$100,000 less than budgeted in 2021?

D. BRAGG: The variance due to vacancies within the division during the year. It's going to be \$936,000 this year due to routine salaries and based on being fully staffed up.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

4.3.02, Salaries.

D. BRAGG: That's \$284,000 right?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

D. BRAGG: That's variance due to routine salary adjustments and the \$185,000 was due to a vacancy within the division during the year. The \$284,000, we'll be completely staffed up.

P. FORSEY: General question: With regard to food self-sufficiency, I know there's been a problem with a pig farm in the Exploit's District that's been now gone, apparently. There's a local beef farm in Northern Arm, same thing, that's had really bad results. So what is government really doing to try to alleviate some of the food self-sufficiency with regard to beef and meats and that sort of thing, if this stuff keeps happening with regard to cost?

D. BRAGG: So prior to me, there was a program in which there was beef/cattle brought into the province. We have a CAP program that's shared with us and the feds and the famers that's being utilized by most of the farmers in our province.

We're doing all we can. Currently, we're at 17 per cent in fruits and vegetables. We're hoping to get to 20 per cent this year, thanks mostly to potatoes. We're 100 per cent sufficient in milk, eggs and chicken in this province right now.

So we're working with farmers; it is unfortunate when we hear of an abattoir or a farm that closes but we're working wherever and whenever we can with them. We've dedicated an ADM, fully now, to the farming industry.

P. FORSEY: Okay. All right.

Yeah, that it was bad news actually, it really was.

You've mentioned the potatoes; I know last year \$2.7 million was given to two farms. What's the status on both of those farms, actually?

D. BRAGG: It would do your heart good to visit these new farms that we put into circulation last year on the West Coast. I forget the name because it's a brook up around Cormack and the other one is near – not the brook but the name of a brook; we obviously aren't farming a brook – but the two farms, one by the brook and one just before you get to Deer Lake; you need to go in there.

If you have ever been to PEI, it is the reddest clay anywhere you are going to find in this province. If you want to find a small pebble or a rock to pickup, it is just not there. It is great soil.

I was so amazed; I visited last fall and the b'ys said, get out and we'll get a meal of potatoes. And I said, well the stalks are only that high and I laughed. I said there's nothing there because our stalks are like you need to mow them down to get through them in the fall. The farmer said you'll be surprised. They get a return of one on 10 for every potato they put in the ground. And every potato I pulled up was the size of that glass. It was amazing.

You should go over when they're doing the planting and go back again later in the fall during the harvest because, like I said, it would just do your heart good to see what we can actually produce here in this province.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

4.1.01 to 4.5.01, MHA Evans.

I just want to remind the Committee that we are due to clue up somewhere around noon and we have 10 minutes allotted to MHA Trimper as well; I just put that in the back of your mind.

Thank you.

L. EVANS: 4.1.01, Land Management, so we're back at the beginning again. Transportation and Communications, last year's actuals were \$13,400 over budget. I'm just looking for the reason why.

D. BRAGG: It is just higher travel expenditures during the year.

L. EVANS: Higher travel.

Thank you.

You already partially answered the question there for Revenue - Provincial. Last year's actuals were \$5,250,000 under budget and the actuals for this revenue has been drastically lowered than estimated for the last three years. Now, is that all because of COVID?

D. BRAGG: I wouldn't be able to say that it is all because of COVID because you never know what some land values will be. Previous years may have been a big development somewhere that we took in megabucks and then you could deal with a lot.

The deputy minister just said we have 1,147 applications in so far this year – this year only being early May so we're looking at probably close to 4,000 or 5,000 applications before the year is through. Plus some of these that we get paid for will be from the previous year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

4.1.02, Land Development: Are there any plans to make more Crown lands available for lease this year and, if so, how much land and where?

D. BRAGG: This province has got a pot full of land that's available. So if you can find a place, except for a lands claim in the Northern part of Labrador, all the rest of the province, unless it's granted land, is open to be applied for or for granted land.

We're doing a study, as you would know now, of cabin lots along salmon rivers in Labrador, so it's a little slow. We're not taking any applications, I guess, to be fair right now, out of Southern Labrador, but on the Island portion of the province, if you can dream it, you can almost apply for a piece of Crown lands there.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Professional Services, last year the actuals were \$14,000 under budget: What's the reason for that?

D. BRAGG: So last year was variance due to less than anticipated land legal surveys, environmental fees associated with land consolidation and property acquisitions during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, last year's actuals were \$400,000 under budget? Just looking at why.

D. BRAGG: So variance is due to lower than anticipated costs associated with land consolidation and property acquisitions during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Moving to the next section now, 4.2.01, Agriculture Production and Research. This government has made it a priority to expand agricultural production as part of its broader goal of improving food security in the province, has there been any new initiatives funded here with that specific goal in mind?

D. BRAGG: So we continue to fund whatever and almost anything in new initiatives, maybe a honeybee farm. We'll partner and we'll use the CAP program in lots of cases to enhance all the farms and every farmer basically who applies in this province. Some may not get funding for various reasons, but where – I don't know offhand the actual number of applications from last year. I don't know if the deputy minister – I'm putting her on the spot – may know that, but we helped out hundreds of farms last year in development and expansion.

We'll give you the answer to that if we can track it down; if not, we'll provide the answer for you.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Could we have an update on how the regional abattoir and beef industry initiative is progressing? Will we expect to see beef from this initiative in the grocery stores shortly?

D. BRAGG: It's unfortunate, we had an abattoir that just closed down, as MHA Forsey just said, out in Central, but we do have a lot of abattoirs in this province. A lot of these are storefronts. Some are expanding to put it into supermarkets and in the local area, but I encourage anybody who can to buy local whenever and wherever they can to promote our local farmers.

L. EVANS: So would you say that it is successful – your initiative?

D. BRAGG: I think so and I have nothing to gauge that on. Just going around and seeing the smile on the farmers' faces, seeing the new

calves that are there, seeing the size of the beef cows, seeing the work that is going into it. I guess my barometer on that is talking to the farmers who feel that they are moving forward in the beef industry in this province.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under the same category, the revenue section from federal: What was the source of the unexpected \$82,000 in revenue here?

D. BRAGG: So that was a variance due to federal revenue rating to the Low-Input Agriculture in Cool Climate Boreal Ecosystems project.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Continuing on in revenue, the next line for the provincial revenue, this year's estimate has increased by \$45,500. What was the reason for the increase in revenue?

D. BRAGG: There is \$19,000 in sale of seed potatoes and vegetable transplants; \$40,000 was for rental of the farm equipment bank; and \$45,500 for soil and laboratory revenues.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

4.3.01, Agricultural Business Development Administration, under Purchased Services, last year the actuals were \$11,100 under budget. What was the reason for it being under budget?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to lower than anticipated expenditures such as meeting room and equipment rentals for workshops due to COVID-19.

L. EVANS: Okay.

And the Allowances and Assistance there, last year's actuals were \$5,800 under budget.

D. BRAGG: So it was fewer than anticipated industry conferences and workshops that occurred during COVID-19 restrictions.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Let's continue on now, 4.3.02, the AgriInsurance and Livestock Insurance: How many claims were filed under these programs last year and how many of those resulted in payouts?

D. BRAGG: I'm going to defer this question to my deputy.

T. KING: I'm sorry; we'll have to provide the specific numbers of claims and payouts. I don't have them.

What I do know is that it was lower last year, certainly, than we anticipated, but we'll get the specific numbers for you.

L. EVANS: Okay.

The Purchase Services: Last year's actuals were \$900 over budget?

D. BRAGG: A variance due to increased costs for advertising to promote the insurance program in the new *Agriview* newsletter and increased program participation.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Property, Furnishings and Equipment there, under the same heading: Last year's actuals were \$2,000 over.

D. BRAGG: So the variance is due to the purchase of a laptop and insurance for staff.

L. EVANS: And just checking with the Chair, we are going to get the extra 10 minutes for additional questions, right?

CHAIR: The extra 10 for MHA Trimper?

L. EVANS: No, for us. When our time is expired we get an extra 10?

CHAIR: Yes, you'll get another 10, sure.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Section 4.3.04, Canadian Agricultural Partnership: Just looking at the salaries there. Last year's actuals were \$196,500 under budget.

I'm just wondering about the reason for it being under budget?

D. BRAGG: That was a vacancy.

L. EVANS: A vacancy?

D. BRAGG: Yes.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under Professional Services, no money was spent out of the \$1,500 budgeted?

D. BRAGG: No. There was no requirement for Professional Services during the year.

L. EVANS: Moving on to 4.4.01, Animal Health, Salaries: This year's Estimate was increased by \$230,800. What was the reason for the increase estimated?

D. BRAGG: The salary adjustment required for '22-'23, as well as the reversal of the \$250,000 reprofiled to the 3.2.01, Insect Control for spruce budworm spray program of '21-'22.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Professional Services: Last year's actuals were \$41,000 over budget.

D. BRAGG: The variance is due to requirements for contracts with locum veterinarians during the year. So we had to bring in some veterinarians. That would be the locums.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, last year's actuals were \$29,300 under budget. I'm just wondering why we were under?

D. BRAGG: Property, Furnishings and Equipment, \$69,300? Is that the figure?

L. EVANS: Yes, under Property, Furnishings and Equipment.

D. BRAGG: The variance is due to a number of equipment purchases during the year, like mobile vet unit, dental units and autoclave.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I remind the hon. Member that her speaking time is expired.

MHA Forsey, anything left on 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 inclusive?

P. FORSEY: Just a couple of general questions under the Agriculture and Lands. First of all, I don't know if I'll get a chance at the end, but I would like to thank the department and thank the minister for his time today to go through this session. I certainly would like to thank the department. You fellows have been really helpful to me at our office, anyway, as Forestry critic, the answers that I've been looking for.

I must say I've been getting them in adequate time and reasonable times. There is stuff you just can't do, but I do appreciate the feedback you give me and the help that you give me during the year. I really do. So I'd just like to thank you for that. I really, really would.

D. BRAGG: Thank you for saying that, Sir.

P. FORSEY: So I'll just continue now because I know the time is just going to flow and I won't get a chance to say what I want to say. Especially during the moose licence applications this year, they've been really, really helpful. Again, thanks for that.

Anyway, we did mention one potato farm. The one in Glenwood, how did that work out with regard to the potato farm?

D. BRAGG: The Glenwood farm was – I guess that went up on a proposal last year, because we were using it for seed potato and we decided to move our seed potato production all out to Wooddale. So there was a farmer, I'm going to say around Musgravetown, had good success here. The actual numbers I don't have, but I can find it for you.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

D. BRAGG: There were more potatoes that went into the economy in the province.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

OFFICIAL: Gord Peddle.

D. BRAGG: Who was it? Gord Peddle. Yeah, I think you're right. I don't know if I'm allowed to say that.

P. FORSEY: You mentioned the honeybee farms. Speaking of farms again, the honeybee farm in Central Newfoundland, we can mention the name – I don't have to mention the name; I guess you know what we're talking about. Do you have any reports back on that one lately?

D. BRAGG: So the honeybee farmers' association are meeting this weekend or next weekend?

OFFICIAL: This weekend.

D. BRAGG: I'm going to miss it and it's in Central.

P. FORSEY: Yeah.

D. BRAGG: It may be something like if you could pop in and give regrets for me for not being there.

P. FORSEY: Me too, actually, I'm in town. I'm in town for this weekend as well.

D. BRAGG: But I just can't possibly make it on Saturday. The honeybees – except for the one I saw in Pynn's Brook that I basically ran past, afraid I'd get stung to death – I have not visited a farm yet in the last year, but it's on the top of my list to get out to a honeybee farm. There are way more in the province than I had thought.

We protect our bees as much as we can. It's illegal to bring in bees without our approval.

P. FORSEY: Okay, that's fine.

D. BRAGG: Yeah.

P. FORSEY: One more question from me and then I'm going to let my colleague – he has a couple of questions.

CHAIR: As long as it's in the same because we have –

P. FORSEY: The same one.

CHAIR: Okay.

P. FORSEY: In 2023 the CAP program ends, of course. Have you fellows got a plan for when the CAP program does end? Is there ...?

D. BRAGG: I think the current funding, this may be the last calendar year and then then we're into what we're calling CAP 2.0, so it's rolling over into another program.

Actually, there were some farmers last year or new entrants who could have availed of up to \$400,000, because that would have been their allocation and can now follow that up this year. So that helps with equipment, barns: almost anything.

So any farmers that you know, I encourage them to invest and make an application through that program. It's a great program; I've seen great results from it.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

You're up.

C. PARDY: Thank you to my hon. colleague.

D. BRAGG: There are no seals here.

C. PARDY: Quick question: I have a couple that are growing a Newfoundland pony herd in Bunyan's Cove. I know they had sent in an application; I had followed up a couple of times with Crown Lands. I know that it doesn't fit in any one of the particular pigeonholes that you would allocate land for.

When I attended the Newfoundland Pony with this couple, the AGM, Jack Harris – you brought greetings, the minister at that time – stated after you had finished that there was an arrangement, an agreement, with the provincial government of a Newfoundland pony-friendly allocation where they can provide some land for such a venture. We looked at it from tourism, but I didn't know where the department stood on that and whether it was accurate what Jack Harris had said after you finished your welcoming address.

D. BRAGG: Yeah, so there are agricultural leases that they could avail of and would be the way to go. We work with the Newfoundland

Pony association; there is the one on Change Islands, actually, that Netta LeDrew runs out there. She has a piece of Crown land. They can apply under the agricultural lease program.

C. PARDY: Good, thank you.

D. BRAGG: What I would suggest, MHA Pardy –

OFFICIAL: Time is up.

D. BRAGG: Never mind time's up. Get the application over to us, send it to Tracy and I, and we'll help them out where we can. We can't push it through –

C. PARDY: No.

D. BRAGG: – but we can help them with their application process if they need assistance.

C. PARDY: Okay, time is back again.

The other one: I have a young farmer in Bloomfield. He left the oil and gas industry. He is back now with hydroponics. He has some greenhouses on the land and – listen, eager – I think he has the financial resources to do it. A neighbouring block of land by the side of him, Crown lands, is available but has no access; you can't get egress to the road. So, basically, it is neighbouring and adjacent to his current property. He was denied that adjacent property.

So I would say, where this is nestled in Bloomfield, it's either going to be land valuable to him, where he's got the egress, or the neighbour on the other which is not interested.

I know that we sent that inquiry in as well in there, because I would think the logical thing would be that it's only usable for this man and especially with the operation that he has already ongoing on one acre, one would think that it should be a shoe-in. But I didn't know where that would stand and situations like that.

D. BRAGG: So I think it would wrong for us to comment on something like that. Because out of 1,100 applications, you can't just pick one out of thin air. There is any number of reasons why a piece of property may get turned down. It could be a wetland, for argument's sake. It could be

road protected, anything. So I don't know the full details; again, I would ask that after this you could follow up with us.

C. PARDY: Yes.

The last thing, I don't know much and I didn't plan on asking the question, but I had a couple – you posted in our district, areas of agricultural interest. So they were posted on the map, around a pond I believe, so I had residents in Bonavista who put in a bid for one of those. And they put in, only to find out through Forestry that it was denied. They didn't know – they said why in the world would you have applications for agricultural interest that would be, that they can apply for, only to find that once you did apply that –

D. BRAGG: Yeah, again, we don't have the intricate details of that application.

T. KING: (Inaudible.)

D. BRAGG: Okay, so my deputy assures me we are looking at that.

C. PARDY: Okay good, thank you.

D. BRAGG: So it's on her plate, obviously, but yeah.

C. PARDY: I share my hon. colleagues about, great job. One thing about these Estimates, when you come here to meet with people, you find out the expertise and the level of expertise that we have in our public service.

D. BRAGG: Hundred per cent. It isn't sitting right here, just so you know. It's all around me.

C. PARDY: So I've always contended that, listen, we ought not to be farming out anything outside of Newfoundland and Labrador because all the human resources that I think we desire would be within the province. And that's highlighted in the Estimates.

Thank you very much.

D. BRAGG: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Do you have anything left in 4.1.01 to 4.5.01?

MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Yes, thank you.

4.4.01, Animal Health: Just under Grants and Subsidies there, last year's actuals were \$15,000 under budget. So what was the reason for being under?

D. BRAGG: So the variance is due to the lower than anticipated grant expenditures during the year. Of the \$133,500, \$110,000 goes to the SPCA; \$15,000 to the Chinook program; \$5,000 to animal welfare; \$2,500 to Canadian Animal Health Laboratorians Network; and \$1,000 goes to the Daphne Taylor Award.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Section 4.5.01, Crown Land: Under Salaries, last year's actuals were \$240,000 over budget. This year's estimate is increased by \$247,900. Was this a new position unexpectedly added to the department?

D. BRAGG: So the \$3.6 million will be a variance due to the higher than anticipated salary expenditures during the year, for example overtime and additional resources. The \$3.17 million is salary adjustments required for '22-'23, as well as reversal of \$230,000 reprofiled to 3.2.01, insect control for spruce budworm program for '21-'22.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Under Professional Services, what was the source of the unbudgeted \$50,000 expense there on that line?

D. BRAGG: The variance is due to Professional Services required work related on Crown Lands to automation.

L. EVANS: So Professional Services for automation?

D. BRAGG: Automation, yes.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Purchased Services, last year's actuals were \$13,000 under budget. Why was that?

D. BRAGG: Variance due to lower than anticipated Purchased Services expenditures such as printing services, recycling and shredding services, and contracting services during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Continuing on, Property, Furnishings and Equipment, last year's actuals were \$15,000 over budget. Why were we over?

D. BRAGG: The variance is due to requirements for GPS units, scanners, laptops and desks during the year.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

Just two general questions. I know you talked about Glenwood, but what's the status of the farmers who received the agricultural leases for the large-scale potato production last April. I know you talked about Glenwood, but there were a couple more there.

D. BRAGG: Yes. There were two out on the West Coast, both in the Deer Lake area, in which we developed some land. It's actually going to take us from 17 per cent in fruits and vegetables to over 20 per cent sustainability this year once these farms are in full production.

L. EVANS: Okay, perfect. That's good.

This government has made a commitment to strengthen the province's agricultural sector and to double food self-sufficiency in fruit and vegetable production to 20 per cent by 2022. So can the department comment on if this goal has been reached and if there is a new target?

D. BRAGG: So providing we would have a good grow season, we should exceed the 20 per cent this year. In September, in the harvest season, we expect to exceed in fruits and vegetables. As I have said before, in milk, eggs and chickens, we are 100 per cent right now. We actually export – we have industrial milk that leaves this province every single day.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

That ends my questions.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

So if the Committee is ready for the question, shall 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 carried.

CLERK: Enforcement and Resource Services, 5.1.01 to 5.2.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01 to 5.2.02 inclusive carry?

Again, we are running short on our time. If MHA Forsey or MHA Evans has any questions in that section before we call the total and give MHA Trimper some time.

MHA Forsey, do you have any questions in section 5?

P. FORSEY: Section 5.1.01, Salaries: Why are Salaries \$240,000 more than anticipated?

D. BRAGG: So that is the \$1.325 million. Variance is due to higher than anticipated salary expenditures during the year for additional IM and policy resources required.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Revenue - Provincial, explain the source of \$1,215,000 in additional revenue.

D. BRAGG: So the variance is due to a loan recovery payments received during the year related to previous investments on the department's former Forestry Industry Diversification Program.

P. FORSEY: Okay. I am good on that one.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MHA Evans.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Looking at section 5.2.02, Enforcement. Would we be able to get an update on any work that is done with the Labrador Resource Enforcement Division?

D. BRAGG: I'm going to defer that and would say that the ADM has just recently taken over this part of the department, so I'm going to look for Mr. Balsom now for a response.

T. KING: No, I've got that.

D. BRAGG: Okay, sorry.

T. KING: So under the consolidation between our Enforcement Division and Forestry services, now there are 19 enforcement officer positions in Labrador, 15 of those are currently staffed and four are vacant including two in Churchill Falls, one in Wabush and one in Cartwright.

L. EVANS: Okay, thank you.

It seems like most of the answers to the questions that I have left remaining are actually probably in the binder. I'm actually going to defer now and give time to my hon. colleague from Lake Melville.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Before we do that, I'll ask the question.

Shall 5.1.01 to 5.2.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 5.1.01 through 5.2.02 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall the Estimates of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture carried without amendment.

CHAIR: Before we move on to our adjournment and next meeting, as promised, we offer our colleague, MHA Trimper, some time to ask some questions.

The floor is yours, Sir.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you, Chair.

It's been an interesting morning. Thanks to the department for your patience and your professionalism. I have a few questions in my 10 minutes.

I'm going to start with caribou. The MHA for Torngat Mountains raised a couple of points. I'm well aware of the challenges of trying to control hunting, particularly in Southern Labrador. So there are two points that I'd like the minister or somebody to comment on. One is what efforts, if any, are being made to re-establish the Labrador Woodland Caribou Recovery Team? This was a very effective group. It contained biologists, enforcement,

Indigenous leadership from both Quebec and Labrador and it has been not active for years. It would be great to see this back. I feel it would be so much of the solution of the problem.

The other aspect, Minister, and I know it's difficult, I've had to face this myself, but I do believe, as I've said for a long time, the discussions need to go on in the communities not in the bush. I wonder what efforts you and/or your team have made to actually go into some of these communities in Quebec on the North Shore and sit down and have a discussion.

Thank you.

S. BALSOM: The answer is – I guess it is a short answer – we are going to reconvene the recovery team. We feel like that is the best solution to get our Indigenous partners and local experts. We'd like to take a look at it with a different lens and have it more of a partnership with the Indigenous groups and communities because of the Boreal Caribou Conservation Agreement and the partnerships we've signed under that.

So, basically, that is the next step and it will be a priority for this budget year for sure.

P. TRIMPER: Well, thank you very much; you just made my day. Excellent.

D. BRAGG: And the second part of your question, you talk about getting into the communities. It's been a plan of mine and in the department for a long time to get in to the North Shore of Quebec, but as we all know, COVID restrictions have made travelling outside of your core group so difficult for the last two years.

As soon as it permits, I'm going to work with the MHA for the South Coast of Labrador and we're going to get in there and we're going to work with Indigenous Affairs. Actually, I'm hoping to bring – because I really feel if I walk in there by myself it's like this guy from St. John's – although I'm not from St. John's. But you need local people to be in those meetings. What I say won't resonate as well as some elder from somewhere up and down the Coast to go with us. So that's the plan, if COVID allows us to do it.

P. TRIMPER: Excellent, the recovery team will get you there. That will give you that representation. So that's really good news. Many people are going to be very happy to hear that.

Switching over to the capelin fishery. Can someone describe to me what does this fishery generate in terms of GDP, economic growth, millions – whatever metric you'd like to use, just how important is this fishery to our economy?

D. BRAGG: The capelin fishery has been very lucrative in the province for years and years and it always comes at a time between the cod and after the crab, sort of thing. So it fills the void for so many fish plants that would do groundfish. The actual number – did you say 17 million pounds?

OFFICIAL: No, I said \$17 million is the landed value.

D. BRAGG: So \$17 million is the landed value on capelin. So it's not something that we can easily sweep under the rug. Because, as you know, many of our rural communities deal so much on the EI system and being able to be EI eligible. The capelin plays a factor into that in some plants more than others to be honest.

If you look at the Barry's plant in Dover, they probably will get eight weeks work out of capelin, whereas the one probably in Wesleyville will only get two weeks. It depends on the buyer, how far they're willing to truck, but it certainly makes a difference to a lot of the fish plants in the province.

P. TRIMPER: Unfortunately, my position is it's creating a void in the food chain and so many of the other problems we're having, whether it be from tourism, attracting whales just to a bay through to our cod stocks and the long debate that we had this morning around seals. Capelin is the fertilizer for the ocean.

Anyway, thank you.

It's good to know what the dollar amount is, so that helps put it in perspective.

Could I get an update – I need to go with a local issue on JP Forestry and their plans for the Upper Lake Melville area for 2022?

D. BRAGG: I'm not sure if we have anything from JP. I know they just took out a truckload; you and I visited that site where they took out a shipload or half a shipload of timber that would have been left over from the Muskrat Falls transmission line.

I'm going to look to my ADM behind me, because there may be something in that I'm not aware of right now. Mr. Balsom will just pick it up from there.

S. BALSOM: We did not receive any additional requests from JP Forestry for a project. However, we have received two separate requests to access timber in the area, which we have under review right now. We'll be deciding on what the best course of action is, how to go forward in the next very near future, because we do know there are two interested – at least two at this point and who knows maybe there are more, if we asked. But JP Forestry as a company has not provided any new proposal.

P. TRIMPER: Okay, that's great. Thank you.

I was aware of one of them. I think we've all learned a lot from the last couple of years and we can go in with our eyes wide open. So that's good news.

I need to ask one on behalf of my constituency assistant about the review of the animal care act. I know that's ongoing. I just wondered where the department is sitting in terms of whether or not you see a return to giving entities like the SPCA investigative and seizure abilities in their authority, as under the act.

D. BRAGG: I guess right now the only people who can probably do seizures or do an investigation would be the police force and our enforcement office. So RNC, the RCMP like I said, our full enforcement group which Steve commands right now. We're going through the engagement process. I'm looking forward to that. We're looking to make hopefully some good changes. I can only encourage people to log in to engageNL and take their part and do and say what they want us to hear.

It worked really well when we did the engageNL with the moose management. Then we did the online version, we did a Facebook live sort of

thing or a Zoom live. That worked really well. I'm not sure if we're there yet with this one, but if we need to be and the request is there – so like I said, as long as everyone can get their two cents in and their input into our system, we'll listen to it and we'll provide feedback. I know I have a strong ally that works close to me that's strong on the animal health protection in this province.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you. I've got one more question.

Minister, if I may – and I believe you touched on it earlier, so I apologize if I missed it, but it's on Crown lands and the processing of the various inquiries. Do you have a metric for us in terms of – I assume, because I'm not hearing that much about it; I certainly did a few years ago – the frustration of so many of our citizens in terms of working with Crown Lands.

My impression is that the wait time is reduced. I wonder if you could comment on that.

D. BRAGG: Yeah, I'm going to turn that to my DM, Tracy.

T. KING: For a routine Crown Lands application right now, the average turnaround time is 68 business days to a decision. We think there's been a lot of positive movement; certainly, we've cleared a lot of the backlog. There are still some tangly files that are hanging around.

Certainly, MHA Trimper, I would agree that we've really turned a corner. As well, we also have projects going on now with the OCIO to redesign and make the website more user-friendly, and to do more of a smart application, similar to what you see for DGSNL. We're moving in that direction to try and improve our turnaround time as well, but we're pretty pleased with where things stand right now given where we've been.

P. TRIMPER: And that was 68, not 628.

T. KING: No, 68.

P. TRIMPER: Sixty-eight, thank you.

Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you to the team.

CHAIR: Thank you, MHA Trimper.

I know everybody's had the opportunity to say how much they appreciate the department and you, Minister, this morning, so I'm going to give you a few minutes or 30 seconds or so to just clue it up.

D. BRAGG: Okay, thank you very much.

Thanks for the opportunity to be here in Estimates. It's always interesting to see what questions are coming up. It's sort of like a Question Period off the cuff, that you get asked the questions you want, whether it's from your district or right from the Estimates. So I think it's very important – we spent three hours this morning.

Now, I just sit here and the people behind me and around me give me the notes to answer these questions, what we're going to give you. So while you thank them, I also thank the staff around me and even the staff that's not here today who helped to make this possible. We have a great department that is doing great things in this province.

We're looking out to the resource; we're growing vegetables. You couldn't ask for a better department to represent this province. We even have the pitcher plant on our logo for God's sake; we're looking out to the pitcher plant. We do things – we look out to the brown bats; we look out to rare lichens. This department does so many things. It is the sweetness of a honeybee to the sourness of sour milk when it comes down to it.

I know MHA Parry was so amazed that we export milk. That's another thing. The thing that I see about this and what you learn, the staff give me the knowledge to come here and help with this presentation, but they also encourage me to get out around the province, which I do a lot of. Until you see a robot milk a cow, or 11-million dozen eggs being tossed in the air at some point, you don't get the true value of what we actually do in this province.

I was amazed by the number of farms. I was never amazed by the number of fishing enterprise, but I was amazed by the number of farms that are in this province, from one end to the other. It's amazing. When you walk in, whether it's someone with small hydroponics or someone with 100 acres of wheat, the smile and the look on their face to know that they're contributing to us, to our food sustainability, means a lot to us.

We are very serious about what we do: protect our wildlife and grow our fruit and vegetables and beef industries. Thank you for coming here this morning. I turn to my team and say thank you guys so very much for today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

If the Committee is ready for the question, I'll ask for a mover for adjournment. So moved by Minister Stoodley.

Thank you all.

The next meeting of our Committee is Monday, May 9 at 9 a.m. to consider the Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

Everybody have a great day.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.