



**PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on  
Resources**

March 23, 2023 - Issue 11

Department of Environment and Climate Change

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## **RESOURCE COMMITTEE**

Department of Environment and Climate Change

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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: Bobbi Russell

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Appearing:

### **Department of Environment and Climate Change**

Hon. Bernard Davis, MHA, Minister

Valerie Snow, Deputy Minister

Tara Kelly, Assistant Deputy Minister, Environment

Dr. Susan Squires, Assistant Deputy Minister, Climate Change

Yvonne Scott, Assistant Deputy Minister, Labour

Haseen Khan, Director, Water Resources Management Division

Bonnie Steele, Departmental Controller

Debbie Marnell, Director of Communications

### **Also Present**

Hon. John Abbott, MHA, Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development

Jim Dinn, MHA

Joedy Wall, MHA

Scott Reid, MHA

Bradley Russell, Official Opposition Caucus Office

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus Office

Jim Locke, Government Members' Caucus Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Joedy Wall, MHA for Cape St. Francis, substitutes for Craig Pardy, MHA for Bonavista.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Abbott, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

**CHAIR (Warr):** Good evening, welcome to the Estimates of Environment and Climate Change. Before we get started, just a few housekeeping issues. I just want to announce the substitutions tonight. MHA Joedy Wall is substituting in for MHA Craig Pardy.

I don't see any unaffiliated Members here so, should they arrive a little later, I just wanted to have an agreement amongst Committee Members. Last year if you would remember, we offered the unaffiliated Members 10 minutes each at the end of the session. I just wanted to make sure that everybody was in agreement with that.

Thank you.

**B. DAVIS:** Mr. Chair, at the end of the session or at the end of the section?

**CHAIR:** At the end of the session.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** So, again, we've got three hours allotted. We'll look at taking a break, probably, half way through and we'll see how the Committee feels.

Just a reminder to the witnesses and department officials, always identify

yourself. Just wait for your tally light. Put up your hand and when you're recognized, wait for your tally light and you can go ahead and speak.

Members and officials are reminded not to make any adjustments to the chair that they are seated in. They're adjusted to the Members for the House of Assembly. Water coolers, just to remind you, are at both ends of the Legislature.

**B. DAVIS:** And recycling bin.

**CHAIR:** Pardon?

**B. DAVIS:** And recycling bin.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

Okay, just an overview before we start. First, I'll ask the Members of the Committee and any staff attending to introduce themselves. Then I'll ask the minister to introduce your staff and we'll move right into the minutes of the previous meeting. Then I'll ask the Clerk to announce our first set of subheads.

So starting with MHA Stoyles, I'll ask you to put up your hand and wait for your tally light and introduce yourself.

**L. STOYLES:** Lucy Stoyles, MHA, Mount Pearl North.

**S. REID:** MHA Scott Reid from St. George's - Humber.

**J. ABBOTT:** John Abbott, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

**J. LOCKE:** Jim Locke, Government Members' Office.

**S. KENT:** Steven Kent, Sessional Assistant for the NDP Caucus.

**J. DINN:** Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

**J. WALL:** Joedy Wall, MHA, beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

**B. RUSSELL:** Bradley Russell, Director of Communications and Digital Strategy with His Majesty's Official Opposition.

**P. FORSEY:** Pleaman Forsey, MHA, Exploits.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Minister, if I could have you introduce your staff.

**B. DAVIS:** I am going to let my staff introduce themselves after.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** Minister Bernard Davis, MHA for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, the beautiful district of and historic; Minister of Environment and Climate Change; responsible for Labour, WorkplaceNL and the Review Division and a couple of other little things as well, but we'll leave that off the agenda here today.

**V. SNOW:** Valerie Snow, Deputy Minister.

**B. STEELE:** Bonnie Steele, Departmental Comptroller.

**Y. SCOTT:** Yvonne Scott, ADM of Labour.

**D. MARNELL:** Debbie Marnell, Director of Communications.

**H. KHAN:** Haseen Khan, Director of Water Resources.

**S. SQUIRES:** Susan Squires, ADM of Climate Change branch.

**T. KELLY:** Tara Kelly, ADM, Environment.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Again, welcome to all.

First of all, all Members of the Committee have a copy of the minutes and I'll look for a mover of those minutes and a seconder, please.

**L. STOYLES:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** Moved by MHA Stoyles; seconded by MHA Forsey.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Motion passed.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** Okay, I'll ask the Clerk to call the first set of subheads and, again, we're starting with Labour.

**CLERK (Russell):** 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive.

**CHAIR:** Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive carry?

I'll ask the minister for a brief few remarks.

**B. DAVIS:** I think the Chair knows that my remarks are generally not brief. I tend to try to answer some of the questions that come up each year to make it easier for everybody, so I'll continue to do that. I'd just like to say a big thank you to the best staff in government that happens to be sitting right behind me and with me. We couldn't do what we do in the department without the great staff we do have. This is only a small group of them, but we have a very diligent staff that they're representative of today and I'd just like to say a big thank you to them. I think everyone deserves to give them a round of applause for sure. At least I will for sure.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**B. DAVIS:** Good evening, everyone.

Thank you for being here to participate with the Estimates for the Department of Environment and Climate Change. As I've said before, I'm the minister responsible for Environment and Climate Change but also the minister responsible for Labour, Labour Relations Board and Labour Standards Division. I'm also responsible for Workplace, Health and Safety Compensation Review Division, which is subject to the Estimates in this department.

I'll begin my opening remarks by highlighting some of the exciting activities in the Environment and Climate Change branch. As a department, we focus on supporting environmental protection and enhancement through implementing water resource management, as well as pollution prevention, regulations and policies and coordination of environmental impact assessments.

Our Climate Change branch focuses on developing strategy, policy, research, analysis and initiatives related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as energy efficiency and natural areas.

Protecting the environment for future generations is a priority of our government. We are seeing and experiencing rapid changes in the climate each and every day – changes that are devastating and long lasting. We have witnessed these impacts right here at home. Over the past year alone, Newfoundland and Labrador has seen rising temperatures, devastating forest fires and tragic storm surges.

We have a collective responsibility to protect the environment for future generations by making greener choices each and every day. Our five-year, 2019 Climate Change Action Plan sets out the course for immediate steps to green energy and the economy. Of the 45 action items committed to the Climate Change Action Plan, 67 per cent of those are complete, 33 per cent have been made progress but are in various stages of completion. This is not

just an effort within our Department of Environment and Climate Change, but works with 11 other departments and agencies government wide to build on these successes. We are now in the planning stages for our new action plan, which we plan to roll out for 2024-2025.

Through the federal Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund, the provincial and federal governments have invested some \$89.4 million over a five-year period to tackle climate change, lower energy bills and support clean, economic growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. To date, the federal and provincial governments have invested \$78 million through this fund to support greenhouse gas reduction projects throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, including in the residential area, commercial transportation, industrial sectors, as well as public buildings. By 2030, programs supported by this fund are anticipated to deliver some 830,000 tons of cumulative greenhouse gas reductions and 650 direct person-years of employment.

For example, this fund is the primary funder for the Memorial University electrification project. This project alone will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 28,000 tons per year. That's equivalent to taking almost 6,000 cars off the road every year. This is the biggest greenhouse gas emission reduction project ever funded by the provincial government. Supporting projects with major institutions is part of our commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through electrification while stimulating clean growth. We are also providing support to residents to reduce both their greenhouse gas emissions and their energy bills through the electrification initiatives.

*Budget 2023* will initiate a new multi-year program, which will support approximately 10,000 homeowners to transition their homes from oil heat to electric heat. The expanded rebate program will be available for low- to high-income ranges. Rebates will

be a minimum of \$5,000 and may increase based upon the income level and the type of heating system and technology used. The program will continue to be administered by our provinces electric utilities and will provide options to pay the rebate directly to the installers to help alleviate upfront costs to homeowners, which was a concern that has been expressed before. This initiative will be built on the successes of the oil to electric rebate program that we launched the year before last.

In 2022-2023, we increased the eligibility for the HES Program, as the minister would know on the other side, for the Home Energy Savings Program (Oil Heat). This expansion of the program helped more people and household income limits were raised from \$32,500 to \$52,500. This allowed eligible homeowners of a single row or semi-detached house who heat their homes with oil to apply to receive non-repayable grants of up to \$5,000 to make their homes more energy efficient and make those upgrades.

In *Budget 2023*, we announced \$3.15 million for electric vehicle charging infrastructure initiatives, including a \$2,500 rebate for consumers who purchase or lease an all-electric vehicle and a \$1,500 rebate for those who purchase or lease a plug-in hybrid vehicle.

From 2021 to 2022, electric vehicles registered in this province increased from 317 to 715 and from 1,408 to 2,149 for plug-in hybrids. Many of these vehicles supported by the rebate.

The demand for electric vehicles continues to grow and we anticipate hundreds more electric vehicles will be purchased in 2023 as the supply chain firms up right across the globe. This is just going to increase in this jurisdiction as well as others.

In December 2021, the government announced the membership of the Net-Zero Advisory Council. This council is identifying

and reviewing near term and foundational actions for our government and others to take to set Newfoundland and Labrador on a strong path to achieve our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. The council will also advise on global trends to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the important use of carbon sinks. Since it was established, the council has met on five occasions to date. They have provided an update to me. This update outlines the council's activities and indicates their wishes for further learning from other jurisdictions that have made net-zero commitments, as well as providing advice related to the mining industry and off-grid electrical generation for 2023.

The province's natural areas and protected areas are a priority. We are committed to taking steps to protect invaluable land, marine ecosystems and unique species throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Work continues to move forward on the sites identified in the Protected Areas Plan, I think entitled *A Home for Nature*. In January and February, we met with Indigenous groups in the province to discuss their priority sites. The establishment of sites will require a fulsome site-specific consultation process, including detailed discussions with Indigenous groups and organizations, community members and interested parties before any final decisions are made.

In 2022, the department reappointed the Wilderness and Ecological Reserve Advisory Council, or WERAC, as it's known. We continue to work with WERAC as the council is vital for the protection of the province's rarer species, unique habitats and ecosystems.

We are committed to work with the federal government to pursue new marine and terrestrial protected areas. In 2022, Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador committed to accelerate the creation of new protected areas of the province. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity and nature conservation efforts that can support

broader environment goals and climate change resiliency, the two governments agreed to work together on establishing Eagle River watershed protected area in consultation with Indigenous communities by 2025, negotiate a memorandum of understanding to assess the feasibility of the South Coast fjords marine protected conservation area and consider the adjacent national park in Burgeo region and agree to advance the marine conservation opportunities on the Labrador coast, in partnership with Labrador Indigenous communities.

The safety of public drinking water supply systems and the reduction of long-term boil water advisories is a priority. We continue to work with the regional services boards, municipalities and Local Service Districts, Inuit community governments and Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador to resolve advisories through maintenance, training and investments in infrastructure.

I'm happy to say that more details on the provincial Drinking Water Safety Action Plan will be coming very, very soon so stay tuned. I know my colleagues on the other side really like the idea of saying stay tuned, but that is imminently coming forward.

*Budget 2023* is investing \$325,000 to establish a permanent program for waste water surveillance. This surveillance program was created in partnership with the Department of Health and Community Services during the COVID pandemic and quickly became an invaluable public health monitoring tool. Municipal water surveillance remains a critical indicator of COVID trends and is a potential early warning system of other public health concerns as well.

Our department worked with municipalities to collect samples of the COVID-19 virus in 17 sewer-shed catchment areas, representing about 46 per cent of the total population of the province. On average, 18 samples per week were collected; the provincial government is committed to

making waste water data available to the public through its dashboard as soon as it becomes available. The Department of Environment and Climate Change post results online as soon as the results are received.

My department has a mandate to undertake flood risk mapping under the *Water Resources Act* in order to identify flood prone areas and communities and allow the development of mitigations to protect property and residents – I guess in prosperity as well. Flood risk mapping is an important planning tool for governments and communities in terms of public safety, land development and infrastructure investments. Flood risk mapping studies are being updated and expanded to incorporate climate change impacts through provincial and federal funding for climate change adaptation.

I'm almost finished, just to let you know. In 2021-2022, studies in the communities of Placentia, Victoria, and Carbonear were completed and in '22-'23, mapping was done for Ferryland, Winterton, Heart's Delight, Hant's Harbour and Brigus. The mapping plan for '23-'24 will cover Port aux Basques, Codroy Valley area, Burnt Island and Burgeo. This will allow municipalities to plan both for current and future climate conditions and minimize damage of property and infrastructure, resulting in better planning and cost savings over time.

Now turning to our Labour file. On January 22, the provincial government passed a new bill, the *Essential Ambulance Services Act*, in the House of Assembly. The act requires unions and unionized employers to negotiate and conclude an essential ambulance service agreement prior to the union being able to strike or the employer being able to lock out.

The immediate effect of the introduction of the act was the suspension of the seven-day ongoing strike between Teamsters Union and Fewer's group until the essential

ambulance service agreement was concluded for each bargaining unit.

This past fall, we amended *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act* to expand presumptive cancer and cardiac coverage for career and volunteer firefighters. Coverage now includes eight more cancers: prostate, melanoma, cervical, ovarian, penile, pancreatic, thyroid and skin, as well as cardiac events that occur within 24 hours after an emergency response. This is also leading the country in presumptive cancer coverages for firefighters in both career and volunteer.

This is an important piece for the people that always are running in the direction of flames versus running away from them. I can't thank them enough for their service.

Amendments were made to the *Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act* in the fall of 2022, following a review of sections 19.1 to 19.14 of the act. It was completed in September. These include modifications to the selection process for members of the Standing Fish Price Setting Panel established in 2006. The Standing Fish Price Setting Panel is responsible for annually identifying, in consultation with stakeholders, particularly fish species, for collective bargaining, collecting and disseminating market information, establishing parameters for negotiations, facilitating collective bargaining, setting hearings and, when necessary, acting as an arbitrator to the panel in the setting fish prices when the parties have been unable to get to an agreement.

In instances where parties to the collective bargaining are unable to conclude an agreement, the Standing Fish Price Setting Panel is engaged and issue a binding decision on the price and conditions of sale. The new members were appointed on March 3 and bring a diverse skill set and extensive experience to the panel.

The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Review Division reviews final decisions of WorkplaceNL for errors in the application of policy and legislation under the authority of *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act*. The final report of the statutory review for workers' compensation system was released in June of 2021 and contains some 48 recommendations.

As minister, I receive regular updates, I won't say weekly, but regular updates from WorkplaceNL and the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Review Division and 29 of the 48 recommendations are considered operational, so they would be in their hands. WorkplaceNL and the Review Division have noted the following operational recommendations that are completed: addressing record keeping and monitoring systems for phone calls, maintaining the current structure of Occupational Health and Safety committees, standardizing training for Occupational Health and Safety committees. The remaining operational recommendations are in various stages of review, analysis and implementation.

The 19 non-operational recommendations require additional financial, legal or policy considerations. Some may require legislative amendment. Some have already been completed of those 48 – one being what I just highlighted with the presumptive cancer coverage.

Further updates on the status of these recommendations will be made with the department and WorkplaceNL annual reports. I appreciate the due diligence being exercised by WorkplaceNL and the Review Division and department officials as they work through the next steps in the process, and I thank all those involved for the important work that they're doing.

In conclusion, these are just some of the many initiatives that we are proud to highlight for the Department of Environment

and Climate Change. As a government, we remain committed to working closely with all partners and stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for all of our province.

With that, I look forward to hearing your questions and, hopefully, answering to the best of my ability. With the staff behind me, I'm sure we'll have no problem answering some of those questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

I know that you went over your time –

**B. DAVIS:** Oh, did I?

**CHAIR:** – and I just want to let you know that I was going to ask leave of the Committee to allow you to continue but it was very entertaining. It was the first time I have been doing Estimates since I got elected in 2015 with you and it's the first time I've seen a minister's opening remarks go over time. So good on you, Sir.

Before I go to the Committee, I have to apologize to Bobbi. This is Bobbi Russell. Bobbi is the Policy and Communications Officer with the House of Assembly. My name is Brian Warr and glad to be your Chair and my district is the snowy District of Baie Verte - Green Bay.

Anyway, 4.1.01 to 4.1.03.

MHA Joedy Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Chair.

Before we get into that, Minister, I would like to say for the record – and I know it's not the responsibility of your department, but the departmental salary details for 2023 were not available. I just want to put it on the record that I know it's from the Department of Finance. However, they weren't available for these Estimates today.

So 4.1.01, Labour Relations, Minister, I have three general questions before I get into the line items, if you don't mind.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay.

**J. WALL:** The first one is, could you please provide us with the amount of conciliation, preventative mediation and arbitration processes that were undertaken and the results of these processes over the past year?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, I can definitely do that. Thank you for the question.

Conciliation requests, as of March 21, was 61; conciliation settlements were 36; appointments of arbitrator requests – I'm not sure if you asked for that, but I can give you that as well – that's 34; preventative mediation requests were 56; first collective agreement mediators were four – two were concluded and two are still ongoing – and a number of strikes. We had 12; one was a carryover between 2021 and 2022.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

**B. DAVIS:** And let me first of all say that I have no problem, we'll pass over both the Estimates books to both groups. We have no problem. We've done this a number of times and we've always done that so we'll continue to do that. We'll give them to you at the end of the thing if that's okay.

**J. WALL:** Much appreciated, thank you.

Minister, how many employees are in this particular division?

**B. DAVIS:** Just give me one second.

Five positions.

**J. WALL:** Five, thank you.

**B. DAVIS:** Four filled and one vacant right now.

**J. WALL:** Currently one vacant?

**B. DAVIS:** We're in the process of getting that person.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, when you mentioned earlier about the *Essential Ambulance Services Act*, what is the status of those negotiations with the ambulance workers?

**B. DAVIS:** A very good question. My understanding is we're not party to it right now. They are both working on it themselves. They had scheduled to meet yesterday and then if they cannot come to an agreement, an essential services agreement, then they have the ability to call us for conciliation. But more importantly than that, they also have the ability to go to the Labour Relations Board, which gives them the clear-cut based on the legislation we've passed in the House earlier this sitting.

**J. WALL:** Yes, thank you, Minister.

So I'll get into 01, Salaries. Minister, last year there was a salary savings of \$84,500. Can you please explain how that was achieved?

**B. DAVIS:** There was a delay in recruitment of vacant positions, partially offset by the salary increases that would have come out of the regular course of the negotiations through union contracts.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you.

Transportation and Communications, last year there was a savings again of \$35,800. How was this achieved?

**B. DAVIS:** Less conciliations occurred so there was less travel associated with that.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** I'd like to start off by saying this is a demand-driven department as well, so if we don't get the conciliation requests – you wouldn't travel to do no conciliations if there wasn't any requested. So part of that number fluctuates every year.

**J. WALL:** Okay.

Mr. Chair, am I able to go into 4.1.02?

**CHAIR:** Yes, we're into 4.1.01 to 4.1.03.

**J. WALL:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, just for a couple of general questions, Minister, 4.1.02, what is the remuneration for members of the Fish Price Setting Panel?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, that's no problem.

The chairperson is paid a \$5,000 retainer and then \$2,000 a day for the chair. The alternate chairperson don't have a retainer. They get paid when they actually serve, which is \$2,000 a day as well. Regular members have a \$3,000 retainer and \$1,200 a day. That's paid by the nominating organizations, whether that be ASP or FFAW, they would pay those. The alternate members would be the same as the alternate chairperson, they would only get paid when they sit, which would be the same daily rate of \$1,200 a day.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister are you satisfied with the composition of this panel?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, we did a fulsome review on those sections of the panel, on how the composition should be, how it should look. I thank Mr. Conway for the review that he has done. He was very fulsome in his discussions with both past members of the panel, but also current members at the time. Both the bargaining agents and the FFAW and the ASP, they were both consulted quite heavily in that report development.

I think, overall, they were happy with the results of the report. I think the balance of how the fishing industry has been stable for the past decade or more needed some tweaks and that's why we looked at the report, based on their recommendations and based on what they were requesting. So we look forward to that.

The panel itself is more the ownership of the parties. Hopefully they never have to use it; they can come up with a negotiated settlement between the parties beforehand. I like to say this is a backdrop, last resort, for them to use. It's become accustomed to being used a little bit more than it has been in previous – early in its days. But what we'd like to do is encourage them to get the negotiated deal that they can and hopefully not have to use the panel at all.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

How many times has the panel met over the past year?

**B. DAVIS:** In 2022, there was 12 species negotiated. There's usually 13 but the mackerel fishery didn't go ahead and shrimp is negotiated in the spring, summer and fall so they have an opportunity to go to the panel three times in those cases, but that doesn't always happen that way. But last year there was 12.

**J. WALL:** With the independent review completed and implemented, do you anticipate more or less meetings for the panel?

**B. DAVIS:** I guess that's hard to say. I would hope that there would be less, but that's both in a purview of the parties that are involved. They seem very focused on trying to work together to find the betterment of the industry, which I'm very pleased with. I know they've met as recently as yesterday and maybe even today.

So I wish them the best in their negotiations. As we all know, and everyone in this House

would agree, that the best negotiations and deal can happen when it's negotiated together, not forced by anybody. We're there to support with conciliation officer. One of the best in the business is working that file with them to try to help them navigate, sometimes a very complex industry and a very complex negotiation.

So I'm hopeful that we wouldn't see as many as we've seen in the past, but that's completely up to the parties involved. It's their panel.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Minister, under Professional Services, can you please provide an explanation as to why Professional Services went over budget, spending \$192,400?

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you very much for the question.

That's where the independent review was conducted and came from. In addition to that, there was a request from both parties to have additional training of the panel members. That was completed as well, which is the lion's share of the money difference there.

**J. WALL:** Thank you. Okay.

4.1.03, Minister, you informed the Estimates Committee last year that there wasn't any reviews planned for the *Labour Standards Act*. Has that changed with the current year?

**B. DAVIS:** Can you repeat that again, sorry. My earpiece is not working.

**J. WALL:** So last year you informed the Estimates Committee that there wasn't any planned reviews for the *Labour Standards Act*. Has that changed?

**B. DAVIS:** We look to review any legislation when there's a need required. As I've said before, you can look at the history of the

government that we are a part of; we review things as they come up that are required to be reviewed. In this case, the *Labour Standards Act* set the minimum standards for us to operate in. Many people in this province operate well above the minimum standards. Obviously, we would look to listen to industry players, whether it be unions or employers, if there are pieces of the legislation that need to be updated. We are always in consultation with both of them.

We have, I would argue, probably quarterly meetings with our unions, and business community reach out on a regular basis as well through the Federation of Labour, but also the Employers' Council and Board of Trades have reached out on a number of occasions when they have concerns. Now whether it be for an explanation of why something is this way or more clarification, but, as I've said before, we haven't got any plans at this point to do a review of that but that could change at any moment when someone brings forward some insight.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Professional Services, there was \$10,500 spent that wasn't budgeted. Can you please explain why?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that's a pretty straightforward answer. That's the Minimum Wage Review Committee. There was a crossover over the two fiscal years, just based on when the bill was paid. I think the Minimum Wage Review Committee was a cost of about \$20,000 and that was just part of it, the way the billing cycle went for that. This \$10,500 appears in this fiscal year. There was a little under \$10,000 in the previous fiscal year.

**J. WALL:** Understood. Thank you for the explanation.

One last one, Minister, under Revenue - Provincial. Can you please detail the \$170,000?

**B. DAVIS:** Just one second.

This is through clearance fees. These are related to both private and business transactions with law firms that require verification of transactions, so they're certificates.

Yvonne, did you want to add anything to that?

**Y. SCOTT:** It's clearance certificates that are requested by business when they're engaged in a real estate transaction. This clearance just indicates that there are no outstanding issues with that particular business at the Labour Standards Division.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, that's all I have up to and including 4.1.03.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

I'll start with the Teamsters. Part of it has been answered. I'm just curious, I know in the debate the minister has certainly made it clear that he was in contact with the various parties. I'm just curious right now what obstacles remain to getting a renegotiated deal. Any update?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so it's similar to what I had mentioned to MHA Wall at that point. It's in their hands right now. We have a conciliation officer that can be engaged, I don't think they've engaged. Yvonne can probably speak to that a little bit clearer if they've been engaged.

But from our standpoint, we were hoping before we ever got to this point that they would have a negotiated deal between the two parties. Obviously, that didn't occur. We

brought in the legislation of what both parties were asking for at previous times, and now it's in their court. I know that they had a scheduled meeting yesterday, both Teamsters as well as Fewer's. I don't know the results of that yet. I can try to give you some insight in that, but it's between those two parties right now. We're not involved. If there becomes an impasse that they can't get past, they can go to the Labour Relations Board or they can engage us to have the labour conciliation officer involved, I think.

Yvonne, would you like to elaborate on that a little bit?

**Y. SCOTT:** Yes.

So once the new legislation came in, then there was an obligation for the parties to sit down and negotiate the essential services agreement. They're still in the process of doing that. We have not had the conciliation officer engaged in that process. They are doing that on their own. But, as the minister said, if they require our assistance, with respect to concluding that, we're available, willing and able to go in and assist them.

The collective agreement negotiations, of course, are still outstanding. So we do have the director of Labour Relations who is still the conciliation officer involved in that process. So once the parties achieve a negotiated essential services agreement, then, in the absence of a collective agreement, they have the ability to resume their strike. But, of course, that would be under the conditions of the essential services agreement that they would have achieved.

That's where it is right now. The labour dispute is suspended until the essential services agreement is achieved.

**J. DINN:** I think if I remember correctly, we debated this at the end of January.

**B. DAVIS:** Correct, it was special sitting.

**J. DINN:** Special sitting. If I remember, certainly the hope was from these workers that this would expedite the process. So, two months later, it's not expedited – right now if they don't achieve what they need to do, then it's going to, I guess, a more formal process.

So I'm just curious if there's been any discussion of whether they're frustrated with the process or this is what they – I sort of figured this would not be a quick process and it's turning into that right now.

**B. DAVIS:** So very good question. I can't presume why they wouldn't have moved in it faster. I can't speak to the negotiations with Mr. Fewer or the Teamsters. All I can say is that the tools that exist for them to pull and levers to pull, they have not pulled yet. It's in their court. The ball is in their court as an example for them to – whether they can get to that essential services agreement, there are levers that they can pull with respect to either a conciliation officer coming back in to help navigate system or to go to the Labour Relations Board, which is exactly what was provided for in the legislation.

As I have said many times in the debate, I don't want to be involved in negotiations of labour dispute; what I want to do is let the parties get to it and figure out what they can move on themselves. When they get to that impasse, which we hope doesn't happen but if they do, we'll be there to support them and they have the pressure release valve to go to the Labour Relations Board to get this rectified in a short order.

I have been communicating with the Labour Relations Board, who said they would make this a top priority and it would be dealt with very, very quickly. The ball is in both the union and the employer's court in this case. Hopefully, they are going to clue that up. I know they spoke yesterday, so I don't know what transferred out of that. MHA Dinn, if we do hear something, I can keep you appraised of it, no problem.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Have there been any new unions or bargaining units that have been certified in previous year?

**B. DAVIS:** That is a good question; let me just see.

**J. DINN:** I think you may have answered this one – and any new collective agreements that have been successfully negotiated.

**B. DAVIS:** I mentioned earlier, MHA Dinn, that the first collective agreements there were four; two have been concluded and two are ongoing. I can give you this detailed information if you would like.

**J. DINN:** Yes.

**B. DAVIS:** I will give it to both sides –

**J. DINN:** Please.

**B. DAVIS:** – to make sure that we have the numbers on the statistics for up to March 21 and if we have any more timely ones than the 21st of March, I'll get that for you as well. That is no issue. So if you want me to give you the most up-to-date ones, I can.

**J. DINN:** Yes, thank you.

**B. DAVIS:** But I did highlight them for MHA Wall.

**J. DINN:** Excellent.

So you mentioned that there were 12 strikes last year; is that an increase or decrease from previous years?

**B. DAVIS:** Of those 12, seven of them were the ambulances we just talked about earlier.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** I don't know if Yvonne would like to jump in there and give you the details on that part.

**Y. SCOTT:** Yeah, '22-'23 was an exception in terms of the number of strikes that we had in this province. It is probably the highest amount that I've seen in a long, long time, but it compares to the previous four years, where it was three, three, three and two.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

**Y. SCOTT:** But as the minister just indicated, seven of those were related to the ambulance files.

**J. DINN:** Excellent.

Have any changes been considered regarding the union certification processes, especially in relation to reinstating card certification?

**B. DAVIS:** No, we haven't had any changes in the respect, although we have had multiple meetings with the Federation of Labour and that comes up from time to time in those meetings, as well as with NAPE.

As I say, we meet quarterly with those individuals and those groups to ascertain some of the problems, and they highlight some issues sometimes, whether it's the Labour Relations Board or some other things they're struggling with, that we try to rectify. I think both would be satisfied with some of the things we've moved forward on with the Labour Relations Board, trying to get them their full complement and some of the issues that they've been having with that have started to rectify themselves. So I know I jumped ahead a little bit for that, but most of the concerns that were raised were with respect to that.

**J. DINN:** Any arguments against reinstatement of card certification that you're aware of that would prevent that?

**B. DAVIS:** There has been no discussions on that end, from our end. I know it's been raised a couple of times, but that would be a consultation both with the employers and the union groups as well.

**J. DINN:** Will the department be tabling or consider tabling anti-replacement worker legislation in the House?

**B. DAVIS:** A very good question, thank you. It's a very timely one.

I know my colleagues – I think it's two weeks from now, is it – will be in Ottawa meeting with the Labour ministers and that's on the agenda. So I can provide an update with you on how those conversations go. I know that finding the balance between the rights of workers and the ability for employers to work within those things is a challenge that we all face. As Labour Minister, I hate fence-sitting, but that's part of what the job is in this case.

So we'll be working with our federal colleagues to try to find solutions to a couple of the major issues that have been timely in the news that I expect you'll probably be asking questions about throughout the day or throughout this evening.

**J. DINN:** Certainly, Minister, you are the Labour Minister and not the employer minister.

**B. DAVIS:** True.

**J. DINN:** Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour has been calling for an expansive modernization and overhaul of labour relations legislation in this province. Is this something that the department has been working on?

**B. DAVIS:** As I mentioned in my previous answer, not directly. We've listened to the concerns that are raised by both organizations when they come to visit us and have conversations and we move on

some of the things that are easier to move on.

With respect to legislation, as I've said before, when the legislation makes sense for everybody, we'll be looking at all of those things as well then. Not to say that we're not looking at those things, all I'm saying is we haven't moved on those things yet. We were always in discussions with our labour partners for the concerns they have and we're looking at ways we can improve the legislation.

**J. DINN:** Perfect.

Is there consideration to bringing in paid sick leave for all employees of this province?

**B. DAVIS:** I expected that question, MHA Dinn, and that's a similar answer to what I would say – that's a very timely discussion that we're having at the federal-provincial-territorial meetings. We've had one set of meetings on that. I know my colleagues right across the country have very strong views on this, and different views. So we're trying to find some commonality and work with the federal government as well to ensure that they support the provinces to make sure this is a possibility.

Part of the issue with this is the ability for employers to pay, as well as the ability for us to implement it. That's why we're working with the federal government on those issues. I'm hopeful that after we have our federal and territorial meetings in the next couple of weeks, there will be a little bit more details I can give you on those topics.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** I remind the Member that his speaking time has expired, but with leave –

**J. DINN:** No, I'm good.

**CHAIR:** Are you okay?

**J. DINN:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Is the Committee ready for the question?

Shall 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.1.03 carried.

**CHAIR:** I'll ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheads, please.

**CLERK:** So will we go back to the beginning and go in order?

**CHAIR:** No, we're going to do Labour Relations.

**CLERK:** Okay.

5.1.01, Labour Relations Board.

**CHAIR:** Shall 5.1.01 carry?

The Chair is recognizing the MHA Wall.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, again three general questions. How many people are currently employed and how many vacancies are there currently?

**B. DAVIS:** The Labour Relations Board has seven employees, five are filled right now and two are vacant but they're in the final stages of approval for getting them filled.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

What is the average time it takes for a decision of the Labour Relations Board?

**B. DAVIS:** That's a very good question. I don't know if I have that detail for you but I can get that. I have a lot of other information here with respect to that but I don't know if I can give you the average time, because it really depends on the complexity. Every year would be slightly different depending on the complexity of what cases have come through and how large the file is and whether there has been conflict between one of the board officers or one of the board officer is conflicted, so we have to wait. It all depends on the scheduling of both parties as well to the dispute. So I don't have that information but I can try to get that for you.

I don't know how useful it would be based on maybe year-over-year trends, it could be useful but that's a very good question. I'll make sure I have it for next year for sure.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

One more general question: Is there enough money to properly secure and staff the Labour Relations Board to prevent employee turnover and delays that we have seen over the past number of years with the board?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question. We're actually looking at doing a review of the Labour Relations Board to ensure that. At their request, to be honest. They want to make sure they look at it to see if there is any more they would need or any – they think the complement is fine for that. We have added two new vice-chairs to the board, that will help alleviate some of the problems.

Obviously, any time there is turnover with any board or agency or commission it tends to impact service delivery. They've tried to mitigate that as much as they could, but you're 100 per cent correct. When there is turnover it does impact the delivery of service and we're trying to make sure that is

fixed with respect to the board. I know the CEO and chair are committed to working through that and that review will take place in very short order.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Salaries, last year Salaries went over budget spending \$644,000 and this increase in being maintained. Can you please provide some detail as to why?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, very good question and I can see why that would jump out at you.

The previous board chair was a four-day-a-week position; this brings it back to the regular pay before. So the board chair went to a four-day workweek and also the annual leave payout for the former Labour Relations Board chair would be included in that. So the actual number we are requesting for this year is actually in line with what it had been before the previous chair.

So I can see why that would jump out at you.

**J. WALL:** Thank you, Minister.

Under Professional Services, can you please account for the savings on that line item?

**B. DAVIS:** It was just lower legal fees.

**J. WALL:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, that is all I have for 5.1.01.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

5.1.01, MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the vacancies filled that are pending, are the people who are being considered brand new hires to the

government or are they transfers from other departments?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

I think we are in the final stages of that, it goes through the Public Service Commission so I can't tell you who the employees are right now. I wouldn't anyway until – but I can't tell you because I don't know the name, I just know that they are very close to coming back over to us to put it in place.

My understand is they would be experienced in what they are looking at doing based on the job ads that went out for those positions and based on how the criteria would be for screening. I can only imagine, based on who has come out of there before, that those individuals would be very skilled at what they would be doing from a labour relations standpoint or a labour board standpoint.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Just saying, in the context, often in these meetings there are an awful lot of vacancies and people, so if two are coming from somewhere else then there are holes or gaps in the other. That's the concern.

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, my understanding is one is a temporary position. I think one was doing it before in a temporary role and I think another person is new – if I remember correctly, I'm just going off the top of my head here now – to our government. I can't say new to government, but new to our government. So it won't cause a vacancy in government, but your point is well taken about vacancies.

I know you're going to see throughout all Estimates, you're going to see vacancies that would be right across all government. That's the nature of, not just this government, every government and every private sector or probably union in this province. There are going to be vacancies

to come and people – we don't know when they're going to happen but when they do happen, it takes time to recruit people.

In this department, in particular, we have very high specialities whether it be in Water Resources, Environmental Assessments or Labour Relations, there's a very tight skill set that's required to do this work. So it takes some time to get the right people in those positions. It's highly technical so that's why the vacancy sometimes continue on longer than any of us would want them to in this department as well.

**J. DINN:** Finally, if you have a number, conciliation, mediation and arbitration processes that were undertaken in the previous year. Do you have any numbers on that?

**B. DAVIS:** We can get that information for you.

The actual earpiece, it's not that it's not working; the actual unit is not working.

**J. DINN:** Conciliation, mediation and arbitration and the numbers that took place last year.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay. So I can give you some numbers that I have here for what statistics for the board, right now. What I will do is I will give you that written copy so you will have it, but I will read it into the record here now.

The number of applications received were 59, applications in process are 45 and the number of applications completed were 47. The number of hearings were four. The number of reviews/hearings that are pending is one. So the three files have been scheduled but there's one hearing that's pending as well. There are 16 written decisions. There are five outstanding decisions that will be coming in soon, I would think. The number of certifications were 14 because your question did ask certifications. The number of board orders

was 101. The number of files withdrawn was 15.

I can give you that information so you would have that at your fingertips at that point.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**B. DAVIS:** For both of you.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you.

Is the Committee ready for the question?

Shall 5.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 5.1.01 carried.

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

**CLERK:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive carry?

The Chair is recognizing the MHA for Exploits, Mr. Forsey.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay, thank you, Minister.

I just have a few departmental questions before we really get into the heading. Are you still applying zero-based budgeting?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes.

**P. FORSEY:** Are there any errors published in the Estimates book?

**B. DAVIS:** Any errors published? Not to my knowledge. I'll say no, because Bonnie is

absolutely amazing. I'm going to say no. But if I do find out one, I will tell you.

**P. FORSEY:** Have any positions been eliminated?

**B. DAVIS:** Have any positions been eliminated?

**P. FORSEY:** Yes.

**B. DAVIS:** We can give you a position list for the department at the end, give it to both sides. There have been, to the best of my knowledge, no positions eliminated. Bonnie, would you want to jump in on that if you had any questions? I don't think there've been any positions eliminated. We haven't even had any retirements this year, I don't think, have we? Which is strange.

We've had resignations. I hate the word "resignation," but end of employments, meaning they've changed in other departments or moved on to a different career. Thirteen of those. There were seven new hires. We have a staff complement of 174. Long term, there were no retirements, as I mentioned before. We have some 13-weekers. Over the year, most of them have moved into temporary or permanent positions and I think five of those have been ended because they were short-term employment for a particular task.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** But we can give you that as well.

**P. FORSEY:** All right, good.

The minister said during Estimates last year that there were no new attrition targets. Has the attrition targets plan been cancelled?

**B. DAVIS:** As I've said before, we don't have a target for attrition in our department at this point. But I will pass it over to Bonnie, who is the (inaudible).

**B. STEELE:** There's no current attrition target, but every time there is a position filled or required, the department does an overview of the requirement for that to determine if they can fill it from within first. If they can't, then they would go out to a competition.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

How many vacancies are not filled in the department?

**B. DAVIS:** Currently over the fiscal year there would've been 30 and varying degrees of being in the process of being filled as well.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

How many contractual and short-term employees are there in the department?

**B. DAVIS:** As I mentioned before there were 14 13-weekers. Three of them moved to temporary or permanent positions. Five are still in that area of employment. One is on recall and five have been end of employment. So they were for a short-term contract to do a particular task and that task had been completed.

**P. FORSEY:** Are there still employees working from home versus government office? If so, how many?

**B. DAVIS:** No.

**P. FORSEY:** No.

Did your department receive any funds from the contingency fund?

**B. DAVIS:** No.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Subhead 1.1.01, Supplies.

**B. DAVIS:** 1.1.01?

**P. FORSEY:** Yes, 1.1.01, Supplies. Last year \$300 was budgeted but \$2,200 was spent. Why the difference?

**B. DAVIS:** Ministerial boardroom supplies were required but also there was a new ADM position created, which would be – no, sorry that was the ministerial boardroom supplies required.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

1.2.01. Executive Support.

**B. DAVIS:** 1.2.01? Just one second.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** 1.2.01, okay.

**P. FORSEY:** Under Salaries.

**B. DAVIS:** Yes.

**P. FORSEY:** Last year, \$813,100 was budgeted but \$1,017,700 was spent. What was the difference?

**B. DAVIS:** That was two reasons. You're going to see that trend throughout all Estimates, not just this one but all Estimates. They are higher due to salary increases based on the union negotiations. That translates into management as well as union. Also, in this case, there's a salary for the new assistant deputy minister for Labour that wasn't previously funded.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Transportation and Communications, last year Transportation and Communications was over budgeted, spending \$38,000. This year the budget is being increased to \$30,700. What's the explanation for that?

**B. DAVIS:** Higher required travel costs and communication costs associated with that to travel within the Executive Branch. I think Deputy Snow can answer that a little bit more.

**V. SNOW:** Just to add to what the minister said, the increase last year, there was additional travel. As COVID is ending, we're seeing an increase again in face-to-face meetings, FTP meetings that the minister is required to attend, and also we were invited to two Conference of the Parties of UN meetings this year. Both of those meetings, the minister had to attend with support from the executive team. So that's why you see the increase.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** In addition to that – sorry – I'd like to also add that depends on where they're too as well. Like, in one case, the CCME – Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment – was in the Yukon, which is a little more difficult to get to than, say, Toronto or Montreal or somewhere like that. As the deputy mentioned, there was two COP events, as they call it, one in Egypt and one in Montreal.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Under last year's Supplies, last year's Supplies went over budget by \$5,000. Can you explain?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, higher required office, boardroom and departmental meeting supplies.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, what was the \$11,400 needed for?

**B. DAVIS:** A couple of things obviously, but the main cost would've been the new automatic door opener for the department, as well as the washrooms in the department, to make sure it's accessible for all. The deputy minister can add to that as well.

**V. SNOW:** There's an increase on both of those lines as well. With the establishment

of the new ADM post, there were additional requirements for office supplies and regular supplies to support that position as well.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

In 02, Revenue - Provincial, could you please walk us through where this comes from?

**B. DAVIS:** Revenue - Provincial – okay, that is the recovery from the MMSB CEO. That comes back to government because the individual was employed through government at the time, so it’s just an in-and-out amount of money, whatever the salary is comes back to government.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay, that’s it for that.

**CHAIR:** Okay, thank you, MHA Forsey.

1.1.01 to 1.2.01, MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

I’ll just jump to 1.2.01, Executive Support.

**B. DAVIS:** 1.2.01, you said?

**J. DINN:** Yeah, I have nothing on the 1.1.01.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay.

**J. DINN:** Just a quick question: A 13-weeker, I take it, is a contract person?

**B. DAVIS:** Correct.

**J. DINN:** Okay, good enough. I just wanted to make sure.

I wonder if –

**B. DAVIS:** I should have been clearer on that, I apologize.

**J. DINN:** No, that’s no problem. In that context, I figured it makes sense.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** Pardon?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**J. DINN:** There are times it may.

I want to pick up on a point that my colleague mentioned with regard to attrition targets and the response that there are no attrition targets, at the moment, but the department undertakes a process to determine if it can fill the position from within first. I’m assuming then that’s either: Can this work be picked up by someone who’s already employed there? In other words, can this work be done by someone who is within the system or maybe from another section?

I’m just curious how long that process takes to go through that analysis, especially if there’s going to be a duty to document or anything along those lines? When does that start? Does that start when the person announces or indicates that he or she has decided to leave or to retire or to move on, or does it happen once they actually vacate the position and then there’s a process? I’m just wondering how long that process takes. I’m curious as to how it might impact the ability then to hire a new person because then once you finish that process, then we start the hiring.

**B. DAVIS:** That’s a very good question.

I’ll take a stab at it and then I’ll pass it over, because I think any ADM can sort of answer that question in that light, but it’s a very good question you raised.

I think as stewards of taxpayer money, we have to always look at opportunities if someone does retire or move on, or for whatever reason, look at the position and see if it’s still required to do what we need to do as a government focus. If it can be picked up by somebody else who, because the focus has changed on something else,

has more time available to them, or it could be as simple as a real-life example, you're doing digital records now versus filing records, your hard copies of records. If you look at that from a technological perspective, you may not need as many people to do that in the future. I'm not saying that as an example here, I'm just saying in general terms, technology may be able to allow you to do certain things. But each ADM would be looking at positions all the time, whether they're vacant or not, to see if the workload needs to be moved around to support the staff as they move forward.

I don't know if Bonnie would like to chat about that or a deputy minister would like to chat about that.

**V. SNOW:** Thank you.

I think that it's not a cumbersome process in that it would severely delay employment. Lots of times it can be done as a bit of an informal process. I can give you a concrete example. We launched a transitional support program this year for the minimum wage for small businesses and within our Labour branch we could look around and see what sort of capabilities we would need to launch that program, some we could absorb and then some we would need to get resources from outside.

That was just the course of a couple of meetings and discussions with our controller to figure out how to fill those. So I don't think that it creates large delays in terms of filling our human resources.

I don't know if you want to add anything to that Bonnie?

**B. STEELE:** No.

**V. SNOW:** Okay.

Thank you.

**J. DINN:** So a couple of meetings, unless it's over a period of a couple of days then, yes, but if it's a couple of meetings over a period of a month then that's a significant delay.

However, that's launching a new initiative. I'm talking about in terms of, if I'm working in the department and I say, look I'll be finishing up at the end of this month, I have a new job opportunity or whatever else. At that point, the process to figure out, okay, will we need to replace this person or will we need to hire someone? I'm looking at when does that process start and how long does it take? Again, if it's an informal desktop exercise, yes we're going to need it, but if it comes down to doing a more broad base consultations throughout that might take a month after the person or two months, whatever else. Then if you reach the decision, yes, it's been determined we need to replace that person, in effect then, in just going through that exercise, it's two months lost in trying to hire a person, or to then go through the process and or to rewrite it. So I'm just trying to get an idea of the process. The length of the time is what I'm after here.

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, from my standpoint, I know that every ADM, DM and director looks at their own shop to see, on a planning perspective, even before someone even indicates they're going to retire or not, they sort of know what a succession plan looks like in their division/department. So they sort of look at that all the time.

So I don't think there's any – I think Deputy Minister Snow did a very good job of saying that there is no lag time, a couple of meetings, but that's when you launch a program. I mean, we would know that position X is retiring two months from now or had indicated they're going to retire this year. Well, then we would know, we would be looking at position X to see do we need to go replace it? Can it be morphed into something separate with somebody else? Or would we need to hire two people to

replace position X? Or do we look at how we rejig the department or division to better utilize the services that we have?

So that's the answer that I can give you. It happens as quick as it possibly can with no delay, because the biggest delay is trying to get the people to apply and making sure you have quality candidates apply. That is the issue that I think we face in government, more than actually the delay in trying to determine whether a position should stay or go because, in most cases, we are pretty lean as a department. Most departments and divisions are, yes, the position needs to stay and let's get on with hiring. That process takes the time to get the people to apply.

Sometimes it could be as short as a few weeks to get someone to apply, but then they have to give a months notice at a job that they are planning on leaving. Now you have a month or three weeks of no position active because they have to give notice because we got somebody, but it takes time to recruit. That's what we face more than anything else. If there was one thing that I would love to see improved would be that process in general terms of how we can get people into government faster into these positions. We don't want vacancies in this department; we can't afford to have them

**J. DINN:** So what I'm hearing, just to be clear, is that there is no delay in the process of determining if they can fill it. That is what I'm hearing.

**B. DAVIS:** Correct.

**J. DINN:** There is no delay at all.

**B. DAVIS:** Correct.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

How much work has been done thus far by the Net-Zero Advisory Council and what types of work are they looking at doing in the coming year?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question. As I highlighted in my kickoff, but I can appreciate how that would be lost in the 7,000 words that I started to say, maybe the length is something that I will look at for next year.

The Net-Zero Advisory Council has met on five occasions. They are looking at the mining sector as a starting point for this coming period of time, looking at jurisdictional scans of what is happening in the other jurisdictions as well as the off-grid electricity generation that would be happening across the province, mostly in rural, remote. They are looking at options that we can look at for that.

So we're going to continue to support them. I know ADM Squires works very closely with the Net-Zero Advisory Council.

First, I probably should have thanked them for the great work they are doing. I really look forward to the recommendations when they do come forward. I know they are doing fulsome work; I know that I can't actually wait for them to come. I'm waiting with baited breath for them to come because I think, either reaffirm or at least let us put some strong direction in place for us on a go-forward basis, which is going to help us as a province, but as other governments that may want to take advice from that Net-Zero Advisory Council as well based on their research.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Of the recommendations that they provided to government so far, how many of them are you in the process of implementing?

**B. DAVIS:** Just for clarity sake, Mr. Dinn, they haven't provided any recommendations. They have provided, for lack of a better term, a work plan, maybe, of what they would like to do first and foremost. As I highlighted, the off-grid electricity generation; the mining sector,

looking at ways to deal with that; as well as a jurisdictional scan of what's happening in other jurisdictions, not just in this country, but around the globe, that are similar to what we're facing here in this province.

I take real strong support from the fact that these individuals are very skilled in their area of expertise and bring a variety of skill sets that I don't have. Some of my ADMs may have that, but I don't have that same skill set. I'm looking forward to their research.

**J. DINN:** Okay, one last question and he can fill it in.

You mentioned *A Home for Nature*, I think that's the report put out by WERAC. What are the next steps? An update on progress, and I'm wondering not only the progress, but what are the next steps that you're planning to take in the next year?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question, thank you for the opportunity.

As I mentioned, we reconstituted WERAC this past year. There is *A Home for Nature* has some 36 or 37 different areas in the province. You can't do all of them the one time. We've started consultations with Indigenous organizations and governments which are nearing completion, if not complete, on their priority areas that they would like us to look for.

At that point, the next steps would be if we agree on moving forward with those, then there would be consultation from a community perspective that will allow them to understand what the area looks like, what can be done in that area and then what impacts it would have on the individuals in the area. That consultation would take a period of time. I don't know exactly how long that would take. WERAC would determine that.

Maybe Susan would like to step in on that. But that's sort of where we're thinking on

that process. That's a standard process for protecting areas. I know we would like to move on them as quickly as we can for sure.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Anything further on ...?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**CHAIR:** Okay.

If the Committee's ready for the question, shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

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

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Environment.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive carry?

MHA Forsey.

**P. FORSEY:** 2.1.01, Environmental Management, a few general questions. Can you provide us a list of what work has been completed last year and what will be completed this year on contaminated sites?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, we can do that. That's no problem. We can give you a list of what exists. We're more of the registry for that. We catalog where they are to and who has ownership of them but most of them, I would think, sit with Transportation and

Infrastructure. But we can get you that information no problem.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

What is the timeline to fix the oil leak on the Port au Port Peninsula?

**B. DAVIS:** That's a very good question.

We've had engineers, I think, go out and look at options of what can be done. I think it's a naturally occurring – I don't want to use the word "phenomenon," but it's a naturally occurring process and I guess capping it off could potentially cause problems in other areas of that.

So I will pass it over to Tara Kelly, our ADM, just for a little bit more clarity on that. But it is not as easy as just capping it off, which is potentially what you would like it to do, but it could cause problems somewhere else.

**T. KELLY:** Yes, like the minister said, we've had staff go out a number of times to do assessments to see if there's anything that can be done with it. It is naturally occurring, so there's some concern about capping it in one spot would lead it to kind of come up in another area. So this is something that the staff – you know, we have worked with IET and the mines area on that to try to figure out if there's any solution or if it would be something better left alone, and that's kind of the stage we're at right at the moment.

**P. FORSEY:** Thank you.

Will there be any action or funds committed to spruce budworm this year and can you elaborate? Yes, you can.

**B. DAVIS:** I can elaborate. It's not my shop; it's more in FFA and I know in the budget that there was an announcement for, I think, \$5 million, if I'm going from, I would say, the Speech from the Finance Throne, today. So best directed to FFA, but I think there is going to be a spruce budworm attack, we'll call it.

**P. FORSEY:** I knew the answer after I said it, Minister, but anyway, thank you very much.

The plastic bag ban is now in place in the province. Do you have any data on how much plastic pollution has been diverted from landfills?

**B. DAVIS:** That is a very good question and I don't have it at the top of my head there, but I think the deputy minister can jump in on that one.

**V. SNOW:** I apologize, we don't have it readily available with us today, but we'll follow up with MMSB to get the diversion rates –and specifically for the plastic waste you're looking for?

**P. FORSEY:** Plastic diverted from the landfills.

**V. SNOW:** Yeah, we'll follow up and get that information to you.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay, thank you.

Canada's single-use plastic regulations are currently headed to court. Are there any implications for our province and is the province involved in that at all?

**B. DAVIS:** It's a very good question.

I don't have the information on whether we would be; I think that would be a JPS, whether we're involved in any court action with respect to that. I think that's what you asked?

**P. FORSEY:** I did, yes.

**B. DAVIS:** So we can get you some information on that. We don't have it readily available here for us, but we can get for you. We'll get it for both sides.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay, fair.

The abandoned St. Mary's fish sauce plant is still a big concern for the local residents. A previous request for funding from the provincial government was turned down. Will there be any funding in this budget to clean up the site? If not, what is the plan going forward?

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, it's not just for the region; it's a problem for everyone in the province. Obviously whenever you have a site such as that, it becomes an issue. One thing I can say is that the Premier has been very clear that we would be working with the municipality or the LSD to find some solutions and work with the federal government.

Currently we're in the middle of working with the town to have an RFP developed to figure out exactly what's in the fish sauce plant and what environmental impacts there would be. Obviously then you would look at what the cost would be to remediate that site with respect to that and then we can make better decisions on that.

We have put money aside for that to the tune of \$30,000 or \$35,000 to the town. We're working very closely with the town to develop an RFP to get an individual that can manage the actual RFP or RFQ to look at what it would look like to take that down or at least remediate the sauce that's inside. I think if Tara wanted to add to that, that would be great.

**T. KELLY:** Just to elaborate a little bit more on that; it's \$30,000 that we've provided, less HST, so you'll actually see that here in one of the line items here under Grants. We provided to the town under the waste management program so that they could engage a consultant. We're working with them to help them with the terms of reference and that kind of thing. The person will be doing a file review, because this file has been going on for numerous years, as you know, and should try to find out all the, I

guess, ins and outs and what has happened with it to do the site inspection and take some sampling.

We've heard various reports on what is in there, but we want to be exactly sure so that we'll be able to come up with options and then part of the work that the consultant is going to be doing is going to be doing an analysis of the options and to give us a cost estimate. Again, like the minister said, we're not sure yet what exactly we're dealing with, which way we should go on disposing of the waste.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** In addition to that, we have talked to the MP for the area. I know that he's been working closely with the ECCC as well as DFO from a federal perspective. But rest assured, we're going to find a solution to that problem. I would expect it's going to be some combination of the provincial, federal and municipal working together to try to find that solution.

**P. FORSEY:** All right.

The last Solid Waste Management report, which was conducted by Ann Marie Hann, listed a number of recommendations. What recommendations have been implemented and what recommendations are still outstanding? Can you give us a breakdown?

**B. DAVIS:** I don't have that here, but I can give you a breakdown of what's been implemented and what hasn't been implemented at this point. Obviously, waste management – the closure of dump sites and things like that have slowed during the COVID years. Obviously, it's a demand-driven type thing from the communities, so working with amalgamation of, say, the Discovery association down there. We're working closely with them and we're working closely with other organizations to try to find a move to making the system that much better.

So there has been some movement on that. I'm not going to sit here and say that we've got the full report implemented because that's not the case, but we will give you an update on what recommendations have been implemented and what ones haven't been implemented as of yet.

**P. FORSEY:** How many boards are still involved with waste management?

**B. DAVIS:** Sorry?

**P. FORSEY:** How many boards are still involved with waste management?

**B. DAVIS:** Right now, there are five there and there's a couple that are inactive as well.

Tara, you can sort of jump in.

**T. KELLY:** We have eight boards and three are inactive at the present. We're working with them to try to reactivate or to update the information that we have for the waste management in that area. So looking at things like what are the new options, if there's anything that can be done? What are the new estimates because, obviously, over time the estimates get stale?

We've reactivated our Waste Management Committee of officials. So we have four parties, ourselves, MMSB, DGSNL and MAPA, working together so we've recently been able to restart that. So that's kind of what we are at right now and we have a bunch of site closures that have happened. There are numerous – there was seven, I think, that were closed this past year.

Any other information, of course, we'll be able to provide.

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, Tara, for stealing some of my thunder. I was going to mention that there was an interdepartmental committee that's been reactivated to try to look at those options and try to see which recommendations we should be moving on

and in which order we should be doing them in, they're looking at that.

We've done some work, obviously, and completed some recommendations and there are some others that are more longer term and will require time for the investments that have been made. If we're going to make a change, then investments that have already been purchased or things like that have to be figured out or contracts that have to be let. Those are things that we're working through but we'll be working very closely in consultation with the boards that are there. Not just the boards that are active but that ones that are inactive to make sure that we make the right decisions for those regions of the province.

**P. FORSEY:** Can we get some of that information in that breakdown that I've asked for in waste management and stuff?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, we'll have all –

**P. FORSEY:** A complete breakdown.

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, we'll give you a breakdown of what has been closed; what recommendations have been implemented; what recommendations are partly done or in process; and then what ones we haven't started yet or in process of doing.

**CHAIR:** I'll remind the Member that his speaking time has expired.

**P. FORSEY:** What?

**CHAIR:** We'll come back.

2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I am just wondering where your department on Pollution Prevention stands with regard to dealing with orphaned and

abandoned oil wells, especially in the offshore.

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so I think most of that would sit with IET for their management so that's a better question – I hate to pass the buck to a different department, but they're responsible for management of oil wells as they expire because there is money that is collected for the abandonment fees. I don't want to take a stab in the dark at that but that would be best directed for there.

From our standpoint, obviously, we're always involved in those type things when we're asked to be involved.

**J. DINN:** Okay. Thank you.

How far along is the process regarding the former American military sites in cleaning them up and has the final cost of cleanup been calculated?

**B. DAVIS:** The answer is no, but there has been progress made as you see through the line by line here. There is some carryover that is going to be for the American military base cleanups. We're in the process of working with our Indigenous organizations and governments, both provincially and federally, to try to ascertain what the costs would be. We're getting closer than we were last Estimates on where that's to, but that process, as everyone is well aware when you're dealing with, in some cases, three levels of government, takes time. We want to make sure we get it right for the individuals that are involved.

They are working through that process, but as you've seen we did put a transfer of money carried over from last year to this year and we'll continue to work with that. We're hopeful that there will be some movement on that from a standpoint of at least completion of some of that work. We're hopeful but I can't say at this point, definitively, MHA Dinn, that we will have all that spent in this fiscal year, but that's the aim.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

So we'll probably have a better idea by next Estimates.

**B. DAVIS:** Absolutely, we'll have a better idea of where we're to. Any time you want an update on that, feel free just to reach out. I have no problem providing that because we're sort of party to these discussions and trying to navigate that system. It's not an easy one to work through.

**J. DINN:** Excellent.

In that process you just went through, I guess, how are the estimated liabilities for contaminated sites currently calculated? You sort of touched on it. I was going to ask how will the estimate on that process unfold in the future if we're coming up with a precise number for the liabilities, for example, at the Come By Chance oil refinery?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

Obviously, each site is different and would have different environmental impacts. That changes over time. If the site is still an active site, well that would change. You mentioned the North Atlantic site. Obviously, that's an issue that North Atlantic would be working on.

We can get you an up-to-date list of what we have with respect to those sites and what we have as the current cost estimate for those, but until you actually start getting into the remediation of those sites, you wouldn't really know exactly what the cost would be. I know we can assess it and evaluate it and try our best to, I guess, give you some estimation of that, but that would be where we're to with those.

As I've said many times before in Estimates, we're sort of the catalogue or registry of where these things sit, but they're in multiple departments. It could be in Fisheries or it could be IET or it could be in

– most of them would lie in Transportation and Infrastructure as government assets, but some of them are private interests.

They may sit on government land that was leased to them. There are many gas stations that have either closed or ceased operations that sit all over this Island that are a vacant piece of property that may sit on Crown land but the company still is responsible for that environmental or lack of environmental effort that's there.

Not unlike the fish sauce plant that we just had a conversation on earlier. That's not a government file; it's an individual that decided to renege on their ability to protect the community, in which case we have to step in, as a government, to try to deal with that. But the first and foremost polluter has to pay with respect to this file.

I don't know if Tara has anything to add to this as well. I was pontificating a little bit because I get a bit disappointed when polluters just leave a province and leave it for someone else to clean up. It's a real bad situation. It shouldn't be happening but you can't control that all the time.

Tara.

**T. KELLY:** Yeah, I just wanted to give you a little bit more information on the Impacted Sites Liability Assessment Program, which is really part of our Public Accounts here in the province and it deals with properties that are owned by government and operated by government. So it wouldn't be every property, like the minister said, the ones that are private sector properties are sort of a different kettle of fish, I guess you would say.

So we have the Public Sector Accounting Board standards. It was developed and it was implemented in 2014 and there are five criteria that would lead a property to be placed on this list. As the minister said, we sort of house the list and manage the database. The reports aren't available for

this past year. They're coming in on April 24; I think we're expecting them. But for last year, we had 207 impacted sites on that list and the liability for that was \$135 million.

**B. DAVIS:** So on the 25th of April, MHA Dinn, I expect a question for you to ask me where the new list is.

**J. DINN:** So with the polluter pays – and I would agree with that – I'm just wondering, because in the previous question and answer, you talked about with the fish sauce plant, there's going to have to be some solution at the municipal, provincial and federal level, which implies that the governments are taking that on and it implies that the taxpayers are cleaning up for that.

So in ensuring that the polluter pays – a fine sentiment – especially if someone, let's say, is starting a business on Crown land, something like a gas station, how do you ensure that? I would assume, for example, that that person or that business would be responsible for establishing some sort of a remediation fund at the end of it. If they're a mining company, there are requirements to restore that back to the way it was or maybe set up an account held in trust by the government so that if they don't do it, we will intercede. I'm just curious as to how do we ensure that. It's fine to say yes, the polluter pays, unless we are going to take them to court.

**B. DAVIS:** So you sort of answered your own question.

**J. DINN:** That's always good.

**B. DAVIS:** Which is good, but that is true. Some of these are long-standing decisions that were made decades and decades ago and, at the time, government never had environmental indemnities or funds that were put in place. A lot of the things that would come up now – you used mining as an example. Mines used to come in here and rip up the ground and then, when they

finished and took the resources and thanked you for the resources, they left a big hole in the landscape. That's not the case today. That's not what is able to happen.

Some of those questions would be best directed to IET about some of those bigger files, but I look at the fish sauce plant that we were talking about earlier. If we can track the individual down, the individual should pay, but if the individual is not living or bankruptcy came into place, those things don't factor that in for something that's been that old.

From my perspective, you're exactly right that polluters should pay. Any time we can get indemnities or funds that are put in place to close out or remediate these sites, that's exactly what's done.

**J. DINN:** But there is a process right now to make sure that people set up some sort of fund.

**B. DAVIS:** Correct.

**J. DINN:** Okay, fair enough.

I think you mentioned this. I was going to ask with regard to the clean-up plans for the coming year with the contaminated sites. A better question to ask Transportation and Infrastructure about that, about what plans are to clean up any of the contaminated sites?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that would be where I would look at – depending on the site. Some sites sit in Transportation and Infrastructure; some sites sit in Education. Most of it would be with Transportation and Infrastructure or what used to be Transportation and Works. But any particular property that you have in mind, let us know because it could be with a health authority or something like that that may be there.

At the end of the day, government would be the registry and I think in our registry we have the ability, who's responsible for a particular property – correct?

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**B. DAVIS:** We can give you that registry. That's available online and we'll have no problem giving it to you at the end of this process, at the end of Estimates. However long it takes to get it together, we'll get it for you.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Just to comment; you don't need to respond. I'm just thinking maybe it's better to centralize one department responsible for it all.

**B. DAVIS:** That's the reason why it's housed with us from a registry standpoint, so it's a one-stop shop where it's to, but it could be in multiple departments that are responsible for an individual asset somewhere else.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**T. KELLY:** I just have some stats here, actually, of the number of sites over the past few years. Actually, they've been going down quite a bit. So 2017-18, there were 187 sites identified and, as of 2021-22, there were 18. This is over a number of departments, so it indicates that there is work being done on these files.

**J. DINN:** Yeah, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I will remind MHA Dinn his speaking time is expired and we will come back.

Did you have further questions on 2.1.01 to 2.3.01?

**P. FORSEY:** I do, Chair, but you did say halfway through that – so I don't know.

**CHAIR:** Okay, if the Committee would like to take a short break for 15 minutes, maybe.

**B. DAVIS:** Three-and-half minutes.

**CHAIR:** Three-and-a-half minutes it is.

**B. DAVIS:** No, I'm tormenting.

**CHAIR:** And the stopwatch is on.

Maybe 10 minutes. We'll come back at 10 to 7? Okay.

**Recess**

**CHAIR:** Okay, we'll get back to our subhead 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

MHA Forsey.

**P. FORSEY:** 2.1.01, Salaries, this year Salaries are being increased by \$2.5 million. Why?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

That's one position with respect to compliance for the new industries that are being put in place, as well as, we've said previously, salary increases and salary steps that would be based on the negotiated agreement.

It's an engineer III position, I think, it is.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Professional Services: the budget for Professional Services is increased by \$1 million. Why and what services are being funded?

**B. DAVIS:** That's to do with the conversation we were having earlier on the military sites, that's carry-over for the military sites to get work done to the cleanup of those sites.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Purchased Services: the budget is being increased by \$3.5 million. Why and what for?

**B. DAVIS:** The same thing, the military sites, it just happens to be in two of those budget lines. You'll see it also, the reason why when you come over to money coming in from revenue for the feds, that's going to be also with respect to the former military sites. You're going to see that in three of those locations.

Just for clarity it's \$3.9 million.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Grants and Subsidies: last year, \$2 million was set aside but only \$27,300 got spent. Why and where will the other \$1 million go?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that is distribution of grants from the provincial waste management projects so essentially landfill closures.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** So it is demand driven. If a municipality or LSD comes forward with it, then it will be expended, but it didn't happen in that case. We're seeing that over the last couple of years through COVID and things with the municipalities, that was the least of their worries. We're starting to see that increase now over time so we expect that is essentially what that Grants and Subsidies decrease is about.

I don't know if Tara wants to add to that or is that okay?

**T. KELLY:** I just wanted to also add that this was a point-in-time estimate when we had to do our projected revised. So at that point, the \$27,000 there is related to the St. Mary's fish sauce plant. There would be additional money spent as well on the provincial waste management funding that just isn't included in this yet due to timing.

**P. FORSEY:** 2.2.01, we're going there?

Water Resources Management, I have two general questions: How many municipal boil-water advisories are there in the province?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

Right now, as of yesterday, there are 186 boil-water advisories, but I do like to always clarify that number. That has been a downward trend over the last, I'd say since 2015. There has been a downward trend there and maybe a couple of years before that as well. But that's based on operator training and putting investments focused in on that.

But that number is also opportunities within the municipalities and LSDs to actually lower that number very quickly by putting investments into operator training or even turning on their chlorination machines. Some of the people are on boil-water orders because they don't want the taste of chlorine on their water. I know that is something that can be rectified, maybe 50 to 60 of those could be removed fairly quickly for non-microbiological issues that would be in the water. The water is not an impact to why that would be under a – well, I guess it is an impact why there would be a boil-water advisory, but it could be rectified by the equipment that they currently have in the town, LSD or the region.

We're willing to work with any municipality, any LSD to try to support them and help them in that process. I know that MAPA has put a program in place to help in operator training in what I would call mobile operator trainers for water that go around to communities to help train the staff in how to operate their water management systems.

I hope that answers your question a lit bit. If not, Haseen can jump in because I'd like to get him on the record sometime, too.

**H. KHAN:** As the minister mentioned, we have made substantial progress in reducing boil-water advisory in the province. We are adopting a multi-variable approach to reduce these boil-water advisories. We are working with communities one on one. What are you issues? How can we fix it? We are investing in our operator education training. We are investing in a regional operator program. So we are trying everything we can do.

In a nutshell, you can say that all those low-hanging fruits have already been picked. These 160 are all high-hanging fruits. These is no one size fits all. So we have to work with each and every community on a case-by-case basis to see what are their issues and how we can remove these boil-water advisories.

Just to add to what the minister said, our objective is not to only reduce boil-water advisories but to make sure that that number does not go up.

So we are optimistic that we will continue to make progress in this area through all those initiatives which government has introduced during the last five to 10 years.

Next week will be our annual event that is annual drinking water safety workshop in Gander and the focus of this workshop is to train our operators to kind of operate and maintain the drinking waters systems as per best-management practices. In that workshop, we have more than 300 participants, 80 per cent of those are from LSDs and towns.

**B. DAVIS:** It is really worth your time, at some point, to maybe, myself and you, visit one of these mobile units that does the training for the towns and LSDs. It's a really novel approach. It's the back of a cube van, essentially. I've seen it operating. It really works well.

One of the things I'd also like to highlight is Minister Bragg made some really good

steps in this area saying that it's on municipalities in a lot of cases to make decisions based on making sure your citizens have clean drinking water before you put, you know, a nice recreation building in your community. I think that's an important investment and, you know, it gets the most funding you can get from a federal and provincial cost-shared mechanism for clean drinking water. So I'd encourage municipalities to look at that. We're willing and able to sit down and work with them at any time to try to get them off their boil-water advisories or get them into a system that works as well.

I know in some places it could be a PWDU system. That could be the best system for them because the cost for putting another major system in would be too high for that particular municipality. That's some of the concern that they have.

We've got education, opportunity for funding and encouragement is what we're going to need. All MHAs, regardless of which side of the House you sit on, should be encouraging their communities to look at clean drinking water for the people that they represent.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Professional Services: What types of services are included here? Can you please provide an explanation as to why the increase of \$4.5 million in the Professional Services?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, very good question.

That is flood risk mapping, co-operatively funded by the province and the federal government. So that would be what we talked about a little bit in the introduction. It would be looking at areas on the Southwest Coast of the province, Stephenville, Codroy Valley, for a bunch of reasons that they need that information for municipalities to make the best decisions about land use planning and also so that we can look for

infrastructure. When we do build infrastructure as a province, that we build it with the right size in the right places.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Under Revenue - Federal, what federal program is this revenue from? Last year, you were expecting \$600,000 but only received \$468,800. This year you're expecting \$1.6 million. Can you explain the difference there?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that's to deal with the flood risk mapping. That's a federal transfer in, as well as there's an opportunity there – I think \$400,000 of that is that City of St. John's. Like an in-and-out sort of funding. The feds give us the money. The City of St. John's co-operatively puts in \$400,000 and the feds put in \$400,000. No provincial money on the table for this particular aspect, but they do flood risk mapping on the rivers and tributaries within the City of St. John's. It's a request they had, so we were the facilitator of that money getting to the City of St. John's.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay, one quick one.

Revenue - Provincial: \$1.3 million last year. This year it's \$1.7 million. What's the difference on that one?

**B. DAVIS:** Sorry, I conflated both of them there into the same thing. That's where the City of St. John's money comes in.

**P. FORSEY:** Yeah, okay.

**B. DAVIS:** Sorry about that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, MHA Forsey.

2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the Extended Producer Responsibility programs at the MMSB, an update on that please?

**B. DAVIS:** A very good question.

We have ones for tires, used paint glycol, obviously electronics, and there's a new one in consultations – and that's probably the one that's most interesting to the people. Now, it's not operating currently, but what we call PPP, printed packaging paper. So essentially, like your cereal boxes. Right now, we're in consultations with landfills, regional waste management sites, to try to figure out how we get money out of the industry that currently collected anyway but don't have that program here in this province. In other jurisdictions, they do.

So we're in the process of trying to either inject new money into the system from industry at no cost to the people in the province, or actually reduce the cost to those landfills that are currently being – because we're recycling that material, but we're covering that cost ourselves. Any municipality would understand how big the cost is for recycling. Industry have to pay for that and that is what happens in the other extended producer responsibilities. This one would just be one that is going to inject some \$10 million to \$12 million in the system at some point in the very near future. We're working as fast as we can to get that money to the hands of the service boards.

**J. DINN:** Could we have an update on the Recycle at School program and are there plans to expand it this year?

**B. DAVIS:** I can get you an update on where that would be from an expansion standpoint. I know we're continuing on with it. We feel, through the MMSB as well as the government, that education is key. Involving the schools and expanding that would be a focus that I would have. Obviously the board at the MMSB would be

looking at those opportunities over the next fiscal.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How many of our used tires is C&D Recycling taking out of the province and does this agreement solve our excess used tire problem? Are they paying us for the tires or are we paying them to take the tires off our hands?

**B. DAVIS:** We can get you all the details of the actual cost but I'll take a stab at it without giving you actual numbers because I don't have them at the top of my head. The tires were always an issue in the province for a couple of reasons. We don't have enough of them to actually create economies of scale in the province for a Newfoundland-and-Labrador approach until this past year, which we were able to get a contract and tender for Halifax C&D to come in and set up shop here where they would come in and grind up those tires instead of sending them to Lafarge in Quebec where they are burned in a kiln for a cement plant.

Just for comparison sake, all of our tires would operate that plant for a day or two. All of our tires for the entire year would operate that plant for a day or two. I always said there has to be a way that we could do something locally in the province for that, so that is what Halifax C&D is going to be doing. They grind them up and they'll find uses for them, whether it be for the making of roads or trail systems in the province. They're looking at all those options. Yes, there is a cost to recycling those tires and they do get a fee for that. I don't have that here at my fingertips but I can have that for you – for both sides.

**J. DINN:** Is there a plan in the works to process organic waste and divert it from landfills?

**B. DAVIS:** Absolutely that's a long-term plan for the government. Obviously if we want to reduce the amount of items going

into our landfill and get to our 50 per cent diversion rate, like we'd like to get to, the only way to do that is deal in two different areas. I think C&D waste, which would be that construction and demolition waste that would come from buildings or houses, we have to find a way to deal with that in a good way.

Obviously, dealing with, for lack of a better term, the organics that we have in the province and diverting those. We're looking at solutions. We have some smaller type pilot projects in some communities like Deer Lake and some others to put larger composting areas and created laydown areas where the community can drop off their stuff. Then they have the opportunity to come back months later or weeks later and pick out the stuff for their lawn to manage that.

That's on a smaller scale, but we need a provincial strategy and that's something that we're looking at this year with respect to whether it be MMSB as a pilot project looking into that or another company that would be contracted to do that.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

An air quality study was conducted in Labrador West in 2017 to monitor dust levels. The necessary follow-up study has yet to be conducted. When can we expect movement on that?

**B. DAVIS:** This is a question that comes up from time to time in the House of Assembly, generally, at the end of dry spells or windy spells in that area. There is a community group that has been established with the companies in Lab West that could be causing the dust and debris. It's monitored on a regular basis.

We have I don't know how many stations, but there a number of stations that are there in Lab West. I know that the MHA for the area sits and has been invited to those community meetings where they look at

dust control measures put in place with respect to trucks and/or placing, for lack of a better term, seeding, over the piles of debris or the tailings.

I know that in certain times when that seeding is taking place, from time to time, it does get dusty up there from that perspective. But I know the company, based on what we have from an environmental assessment and environmental release conditions, are putting those things in place for the community to work with them on. I know the community has been engaged and I know the MHA for the area, who I think sits next to you, does some good work on that committee as well.

**J. DINN:** Is there a follow-up study then – will there be a follow-up study conducted?

**B. DAVIS:** I can check into that for you and let you know.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Just with regard to this in 2.1.01, Pollution Prevention, I noticed today in the budget there was \$60 million to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficiency. That would be under 2.1.01 or would that be in –

**B. DAVIS:** 2.1.01, just give me one second.

**J. DINN:** Would that be where that would be – that money housed? I'm not seeing it there, though. Your department would be responsible for that I take it?

**B. DAVIS:** Sorry?

**J. DINN:** There is \$60 million in Environment and Climate Change to support communities, close to \$60 million to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay, so that's not in this section yet.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** That's in Climate Change which is, I think, two sections away.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** If we want to deal with it here I can turn to it, but I think if we stayed within there, it will make it a little easier for all of us.

**J. DINN:** No, no.

**B. DAVIS:** I was having a little trouble following you there for a second based on that.

**J. DINN:** That's no problem.

And the \$2 million flood-risk mapping that was also announced, that's in the section on Water Resources Management, 2.2.01. I guess that amount would fit under Professional Services?

**B. DAVIS:** That's under Professional Services, yes.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Would it be possible to have an update on the work of the new Muskrat Falls Monitoring and Health Management Oversight Committee?

**B. DAVIS:** Absolutely, we can get you an update on the numbers. One thing I can say to you is it's been established, Dr. Ray Copes is the chair of that. It's actually in Health and Community Services now. We were involved in the starting up of that committee, but it's actually administered under Health and Community Services now from the human health aspect. But there has been no exceedances of any methylmercury in the system that was anywhere close to what the Calder model – as they say the Harvard study. So there was nowhere close and there has been no exceedances anywhere that would impact human health. That's exactly what this oversight committee would be looking at.

Dr. Ray Copes is very well respected in the system for people. I know that if you ask in Health and Community Services we'll make sure we give them a heads up that that would be a potentially coming from you, but we can give you that information that we have. I'm sure they would be willing to share that with you as well. It's publicly available on the website anyway.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How far along is work on the Drinking Water Safety Action Plan?

**B. DAVIS:** It's a very common theme here leading into budget: stay tuned. But give us a little bit of time and you'll have that in your hands.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

You mentioned the waste water testing program and I'm just wondering how many sites are now being tested? I would assume St. John's, I know some of the larger urban areas, but looking at the expansion, when do you expect to have testing applied to all areas that you plan to expand to?

**B. DAVIS:** So we're taking – and I will go to Haseen on this one in a second, because I know he's intimately involved in this one, but my understanding is there are 20 sites currently, 18 sites are weekly, one site is monthly and one site is biweekly, but that expanded over the year even from that standpoint.

Every month or two we'd be getting an expansion, as we were able to do so and working with that. We worked very closely with Health and Community Services for a lot of things that would come out of this, not just COVID but a lot of other pathogens that they would be able to identify for a community that would help in human health and just looking at what's happening in each community where that would be.

I'll turn it over to Haseen, I think, who has a little bit more insight into the locations where they are. He could probably give you a list of those and then we can actually look at where we're looking at expanding to and what the timeframe is.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I remind the Member his speaking time has expired.

2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

MHA Forsey, do you have anything further?

**P. FORSEY:** 2.2.02, Revenue - Provincial, last year an additional \$400,000 was collected. How come and what was it for?

**B. DAVIS:** 2.2.02.

**P. FORSEY:** 2.2.02, Revenue - Provincial.

**B. DAVIS:** Just give me one second.

Revenue, you said?

**P. FORSEY:** Revenue, yes, provincial \$400,000 was collected. How was that collected and what was it for?

**B. DAVIS:** That's a very good question.

It's industry monitoring and real-time water monitoring program that we do for industry, which is they pay for that service.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

2.3.01, we just have a few general questions to start with.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay.

**P. FORSEY:** How many environmental assessments and environmental impact statements were completed during this past year? How many open files are there?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

We can give you this data but I'll read it into the record for you at this point. So '22-'23 fiscal year, there were 419 referrals, 42 environmental assessment registrations, 45 projects that were released, six projects required further assessment, three were EIS and three were EPRs. There was zero EISs that were submitted for review. So they have up to three years to submit the EISs once they are put into an EIS situation. Three EPRs were submitted for review. There were eight projects withdrawn, zero projects were rejected and 20 draft registration documents were looked at by industry coming in to say listen, this is what we're thinking of doing. How does this look? How do we actually go about doing this?

We provide insight to them. They haven't registered, they may never register, but they could register at some point. So we provide some insight to them, more of like, as I said, the demand driven. We don't know what that will look like but we do know that the industries are starting to ramp-up both on wind and hydrogen and mining and others. That's why in the budget you'll notice that there's an increase of close to half a million dollars in regulatory and compliance officers.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

We know the land nominations close today for the windmill projects, especially in the Exploits. When will the EA start on those windmills?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

I can't say what has been received at this point today from our standpoint because it's not our shop. That will be IET, Minister Parson's shop. But in due course, once those land nominations have been received and evaluated and approved, my understanding is that they would then – some companies, as I can say to you, we've got one company that's doing wind to hydrogen in an EA process right now. There are a number that have contacted us that

are moving in at some point. I think most of the companies are waiting to get through this land process now.

If they're selected in that particular area – I don't remember the date off hand when that compliance is going to be finished from IET standpoint, but once that's completed and say X company is given the land in Botwood, as an example, then they would be able to move on an environmental – they don't have to wait until that's finished to do an environmental assessment, although many companies would because they want some assurance.

Deputy Minister, do you want to jump in?

**V. SNOW:** Yeah, thanks.

Just to add to what the minister said, that's exactly right. It's really up to the companies themselves to decide when they're going to register for environmental assessment. It's a separate process from the land nomination process. So we have one company that's registered prior to the land nomination process. We've had several approach us to ask us just general questions about how the EA process works. So we can't really say for sure when the EAs will be carried out. We're really depending on when the companies decide to register them, but we would assume that if those who were successful in the land bid process would likely register with us shortly after that.

**P. FORSEY:** How long after registration would it take for the EA to be done?

**B. DAVIS:** I guess that really depends on the company. What I can say, from the standpoint of the environmental assessment, there are three particular phases that it could potentially go through. So you've got your registration, which public consultation is at every stage. You've got your 45-day registration process for registration of a document. That would mean say company X in Botwood would come in with a registration and say this is

what we're doing, this is how it's going to impact the environment, these are the impacts that it's going to have in the region, this is where we're putting them and this is where we're building our hydrogen plant. This is how we're going to transport the hydrogen. All of that stuff would be included in that particular decision or that particular registration document. Then it would go one of three ways.

It could be released at that point, if all the information is found in order and all that kind of stuff, or the more likely scenario would probably be an environmental impact statement or an environmental review statement, which is two different things and both of those can take anywhere – it's up to the proponent, but they have three years to put those documents in. Then, once that's put in, there's a public component piece to that that, I think, is like 50 days where they can consult after they put their proposal in. Then, once that's released at that point, they can move on with conditions most likely to move on with the project.

So, conceivably, you could be out within six months to a year, depending on the process. It could be faster than that depending on if the company – many of the companies that are out there right now, I would assume, are looking at the current environmental assessment that's under way and looking at that process and building their own environmental registration document themselves. That's what I would be doing if I was a proponent looking at getting into that industry.

That's what the mining industry does. That's what oil and gas do. That's how they build their own case. That's what they would be doing, what I would think, but we can't suppose how many are going to come in. We know that there are more than 31 that have expressed interest, just based on the IET numbers that came in. So we're very hopeful that the industry is going to be a very strong one.

Deputy Minister, if you wanted to add ...?

**V. SNOW:** If it's helpful, we have just an infographic that shows the three pathways through an environmental assessment and outlines the timelines that are outlined in legislation for each of those three pathways. In the follow-up information, we could also provide that just so you can see what the timelines are for projects going through an EA process in general, if that's helpful.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Could I get that information?

**B. DAVIS:** Absolutely.

**V. SNOW:** Yes.

**P. FORSEY:** I'd appreciate that.

**B. DAVIS:** It's publicly available when you go asking but a lot of people don't know where to look or see it. There is a guidance document for wind-to-hydrogen projects that we are working on that will be released in due course, as well, that will provide insight to companies.

I would encourage MHAs that have questions to look at that document because it's going to be very fulsome on what it would look like for particular areas. Each of these is area-specific. So in Botwood it is going to be different than it would be in Argentea, which will be different than it is in Stephenville Crossing or Codroy Valley or wherever. Everything is different. The one thing that's common is the environmental assessment is a legislatively governed process that they're all going to go through.

**P. FORSEY:** Just getting back to the original question, say there's one proponent, and that one is done and registration is in. From the time of the registration and one proponent is actually picked, the environmental assessment would take anywhere from six months to a year. Is that what I'm reading here?

**B. DAVIS:** So I guess the easiest way to answer your question is it hinges upon what the company's information comes in and the way it comes in. If you have your full document and it's completely – so say you go for a registration document, we know that takes 45 days. You either get released or have to move on to, say, an EIS. EIS has a period of time. We have within 180 days to get back to the proponent a set of guidelines. Here's the guidelines that you have to follow to provide the information that comes from the public consultation and the 25 agencies and government officials, both federal and provincial, that meet and provide insight into the application to say well, this is on a migratory path for caribou or this is in an area that's environmentally sensitive because it's got a rare lichen.

All of those things are taken into account and then they can morph their application to fix those particular barriers that could be for their application. That's a sensitive process. It gives a fulsome approach to the proponent but also gives the public an opportunity to voice their concerns, as well as industries, departments in government, both federal and provincial, to provide their insight to see what problems could arise.

To answer your question, it depends on what they come in with, with the report. Some companies will come in and look at the process, address those concerns and be in within a few months. Some will take two or three years to come in. I can't speak to an individual case that we have now, but it could be – and this is our first hydrogen and wind project coming in, so it's hard to give you some indication on how long it's going to take. But as fast as they can get the information, we will turn it out to provide insight into whether it will be released or what conditions they would have to have in any kind of release they would have to do.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I remind the Member his speaking time is expired.

**B. DAVIS:** Good question, though.

**CHAIR:** MHA Dinn, did you have something left from 2.1.01 to 2.3.01?

**J. DINN:** I do. The last question I was asking had to do with the expansion and the progressing on the waste water testing program. I think I'm just going to get an answer on that at that time. I'm just wondering how many sites are being tested. I think we talked about that, but when do we expect to have testing applied to all areas and maybe we could include into that the COVID-19 Wastewater program – is that still under way and, if so, for how long do we expect it to continue?

**B. DAVIS:** I'll turn it over to Haseen in one second.

For the waste water, I would think it's in place for one fiscal year for sure from the budget perspective. I can't presuppose what will happen in future budgets. I will turn it over to Haseen to get you some insight, MHA Dinn, into the sites and when we would be looking at expansion in those sites.

Haseen.

**H. KHAN:** Thanks, Minister.

As the minister mentioned, currently we have 20 operational sites for this waste water effluent surveillance. Our plan is to expand to 80 sites, that is to cover each and every part of the province. But even now, we are covering all key areas of the province. We have very good geographic coverage. But we do want to move to other coastal areas and other inland areas. That's our plan that within the next two to three years we will increase these sites from 20 to 80.

This waste water effluent monitoring has emerged as a very important tool for health officials for their decision-making and to profile the emerging of infectious diseases

in any community. We'll continue our work, we are collaborating with some other partners as well and I'm sure that it is going to help decision-makers to be proactive in this infectious disease area.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How many inspectors are there as of now for monitoring aquaculture sites and how often are sites inspected? I would assume they'd be part of this. Do they undergo regular periodic checks or do they only inspect when they have been made aware of or suspect some sort of violation?

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you very much.

That's in Fishery, Forestry and Agriculture. I don't want to take a stab at how many there are. I know compliance is done in a couple of different departments, but that's one that would be responsible for the aquaculture industry in particular.

**J. DINN:** How will government respond to recent news that many in this province rely on well water that's contaminated with arsenic and uranium?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

One of the things that we've done, we've made available some 5,000 individual personal tests available for individual personal wells. I'm trying to find the details on that directly. I think close to 4,000 of them have been out – oh, sorry, 2,000 kits have been collected so far; 500 samples have been analyzed; 1,500 kits are in the pipeline to be analyzed.

Obviously, any time that there is naturally occurring arsenic or anything like that in the water – and I'll put it back to Haseen on a couple of these things because the reason why we did this is we want people to understand what is in their drinking water. So that is why we put the test kits out.

I know MHAs across the province have had them available in their offices for people that do call. I do thank the MHAs for doing that because I think putting them in the offices close to where people would require them, makes it a little bit easier for pick up. Then I know they've got to get them to a site that's a test site that they can take it out through Service NL, but I'll let Haseen talk a little bit about that.

**J. DINN:** And maybe in answering that, too, if they do come back positive, I'm looking at also maybe remediation or how that would be mitigated.

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, I'll toss it over to Haseen because I think some of this is naturally occurring.

**H. KHAN:** As the minister mentioned, 2,000 kits have been distributed, 500 samples have been analyzed. To answer your question, MHA, as soon as we get the test results, immediately we write a report and we contact the homeowner that these are the results of your drinking water. Either there are no issues or these are the issues and these are the various options to address these issues. Our first recommendation is do a repeat sample, get it analyzed by an accredited lab, which are available on our website, and we are here to help you to address these issues.

As the minister mentioned, there are over 60,000 drilled and dug wells in the province. As of today, we had no information what is the quality of those wells. So this is a very kind of very good initiative of the government to ensure public safety and to ensure that clean, safe and secure drinking water is available to each and every resident of the province.

We will continue our work. Our approach is holistic, that is we are not only testing these groundwater wells, but we are also identifying issues and we are recommending corrective measures to deal with those issues.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Is it possible to have an update on what's come out of the environmental assessment process review?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, very good question.

As you can see from the budget, there has been a staff up in that division. That will allow us to move a little bit quicker on that review of the *Environmental Protection Act*. Obviously, there are things that we would like to not necessarily improve but make better and potentially look at best practices across the country to see. That's going to be undertaken by our director in that area and obviously with the staff increasing that's going to allow that director more time to get that evaluation done.

**J. DINN:** Excellent.

Which recommendations have been implemented as a result of the waste management review and which ones will be put in place in the year to come?

**B. DAVIS:** I think that was a similar question that was asked a little bit ago by MHA Forsey. We will get that information on what has been recommended, what has been completed in the recommendation, what we're working on and what things we have yet to start at. It was a very fulsome review and I do thank the reviewer for her work on that. As soon as we get that information, we'll get it over to you.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Has there been any progress made in combatting illegal dumping?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

I would love to say that we've eliminated it altogether, that's not the case. We have made some great strides through public awareness campaigns that the MMSB have put forward. I know the increasing

enforcement through FFA as well as DGSNL have helped alleviate some of that.

It's going to take all of us educating people that doing this is wrong and hopefully the fines that come along with that. Not unlike covering your loads when you're going back and forth to landfills, it's a pretty simple thing to do. We just need to be fining people. Once that happens a few times the word spreads very quickly and people will start covering their loads and people will stop dumping in those areas.

I know the MMSB, on occasion, have had video cameras installed and administered in prone illegal dumping sites and that has made a difference. I can't say it has eliminated it but we are making progress and we're going to continue to double down on it.

**J. DINN:** Finally, in the announcements today, there was \$500,000 for increased capacity for environmental assessment and regulatory oversight of wind-hydrogen projects. I'm just wondering is this for inspections? I'm just wondering where exactly that's going to go.

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

It is not just for wind-hydrogen projects; it is for increased activity that is going to happen with respect to the environmental assessment area. There is going to be some, it could be as high as 30 or more environmental assessments that come from a new industry, like wind to hydrogen, but the other stuff is not going to stop happening either, whether that is mining or trail systems. It's going to help us with regulatory and looking at those initiatives to that point in compliance. But I think we're going to be in a much better situation with those employees working to move through those areas.

I think Tara can add something to that as well.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**T. KELLY:** I just want to add to what the minister was saying and give you a breakdown of the positions.

So we have a manager of Wind and Compliance Monitoring. We've really set up a new section on compliance monitoring, which was actually a recommendation from the Muskrat Falls inquiry as well to have increased compliance monitoring. So this is an area that we're going to be delving into really hard. We have a senior environmental scientist. We have two new environmental scientists and a position in pollution prevention related to compliance and to regulatory oversight of hydrogen and ammonia type of production as well as others.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

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 read the next set of subheads, please?

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Climate Change.

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive carry?

MHA Forsey.

**P. FORSEY:** A couple of general questions on that one to start with.

Do you have emission reduction targets by year and can we get a copy?

**B. DAVIS:** I'm going to take a stab at it and then I'll pass it over to Susan.

I think the compliance targets we have are – we have the greenhouse emissions act that focuses on industry. We double down on those industries – I wouldn't say double down – we ratchet down on those industry players and they've overshot their targets every year so far. Not as a group, not necessarily individually, but we're going to continue to do that so we're seeing good compliance with reducing greenhouse gas emissions there.

But I will throw it over to Susan to see if there's any more data. If we do have the data, you're more than happy to have it.

**S. SQUIRES:** So the government has a 2030 target of 30 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and net-zero target. As the minister said, within the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act*, we regulate large emitters and those are folks that emit over a certain number of tons per year. They have generally 2 per cent reduction increase per year in their target. As the minister said, they have overachieved to date and we publicly post that information as well as how much they emit and that will continue. Some of the new changes to our current carbon pricing will carry those every year and further reduction by 2 per cent right to 2030.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Is government on track to meet its Paris climate change targets?

**B. DAVIS:** I'd love to say yes that we're on task to meet it. I know that we should, provided we put things in place with respect to our Climate Change Action Plan. I know

that the Net-Zero Advisory Council is going to provide some insight into that. Obviously, every jurisdiction across the world has to do better. We're committing to do better.

Ratcheting down on big emitters is one piece, but the electrification of the grid being the fact that our grid is 98 per cent renewable is an important piece to this. We've got to also remember that we factor in and we say that big emitters are the biggest problem. That is a problem, there is no doubt about that, but our biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions is the transportation network. The transportation network in this province equates to 40 per cent of our emissions as a province, and 60 per cent of that is personal vehicles like cars and trucks that we have.

So the electrification of EVs or getting EVs into the marketplace, I don't like when people say that it's for the rich. What we're trying to do is that's our biggest emitter in this province; the transportation network. So we have to attack that in all fronts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In order to hit our targets for 2050 and be net zero, I think it's important that we do fight on all of those fronts. Whether it's electrification of buildings, government assets, vehicles, fishing vessels, working on industry. I was in industry and innovation for a while, before getting here, and I know the technological investments that we can make in technologies that haven't even been invented yet or even being contemplated is going to be a key piece for the global community reaching their targets of net zero by 2050.

I think Susan can add something to that and our next Climate Change Action Plan we're working on as we speak, and that will be from 2024 to 2030. I think that's an important piece with new initiatives and new technology that we're going to have to utilize. Susan has forgotten more about this than I'll ever know, so I'd like to throw it back to Susan.

**S. SQUIRES:** We also had a 2020 target for previous Climate Change Action Plans which we nearly met in 2020. We were very likely to have met in 2021, when that data comes out. So we are doing better.

If you had asked me this a few years ago, we were well off 2030 targets, but we're getting closer and closer every year with the new initiatives. So I'm hopeful that we'll continue to make progress and hit our 2030 target. We're obviously much farther away from a 2050 target, hence, the creation of the Net-Zero Advisory Council. But given the progress we're making to date, I am also hopeful we will get there as well.

**P. FORSEY:** Do you have any number of how many households still use oil as a primary heat source?

**B. DAVIS:** We can give you that number. We think it's somewhere a little north of 42,000-ish. Maybe a little higher than that but it's in that range. But as you seen from the budget announcements today we're looking at, over the next four years, clearing up 10,000 of those households and moving them to electrification.

So that's going to be a key piece for us. People are making those moves themselves. Whether they're trying to reduce their reliance on oil by putting in mini-splits or central heating units, that's what they're doing and the technology that goes along with that. We believe in this province the best approach is to remove those oil tanks and that's why we have a very generous program that will, at minimum, give you \$5,000, but many other people could get as much as \$16,000 or \$17,000 to change out those systems.

In this province, we don't have a lot of forced air – we have some but we don't have a lot of forced-air furnaces which is a little bit of a cheaper change out than hot-water radiation. Having gone through this myself, I understand the differences in costs

associated with that, but it is something that we're working on.

**P. FORSEY:** In the budget today, too, I also did notice that there was some money there to change over from oil for households. What about non-profit buildings, like Lions Clubs and Kinsmen clubs?

**B. DAVIS:** We're still in negotiation with the federal government on some of this stuff but there has been the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund as well as the Climate Change Challenge Fund that is continuing on our approach with municipalities and community organizations that would be able to avail of that. Those applications will be available very shortly once we pass through this budget cycle and move in to finish the negotiations with the federal government.

I don't know, Susan, if you want to add anything to that?

**S. SQUIRES:** No.

**P. FORSEY:** So that would take in the non-profits?

**S. SQUIRES:** The Low Carbon Economy Fund that we are finishing this year that started in 2019, we did a few dozen projects, including some non-profits. They had to reduce GHG emissions. Some did energy efficiency and many more did fuel switching. Obviously a bigger greenhouse gas reduction with fuel switching. Our request to the federal government is to continue that program under the next phase of the Low Carbon Economy Fund so we'll have another allotment of funding available to small businesses and municipalities so those details will come.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

How many households have made the switch to electric since funding has been made available?

**B. DAVIS:** Perfect. A very good question, I am very happy to report on this question.

**P. FORSEY:** I can see the smile on your face.

**B. DAVIS:** Very nice of you to ask, thank you. It is almost like I wrote the question for you.

We have had some really good uptake on that for a lot of good reasons. I think we have hit the sweet spot on the amount of money it needed to be to help people to be able to make that change because it is a little bit expensive. We have almost 1,900 applications that have been received as of February 28; 1,340 of those applications have been approved and sent for payment; 300 applications are in the preapproval stage and they just haven't completed the work yet.

This is going to help with a lot of people making this choice now because this program, Oil to Electric, was a one-year program and we've seen that kind of uptake. Now we've got a longer window. It's a four-year program now that we have in place so that people have some assurances that they can move on this. Because if you just replaced your oil tank, say, five years ago, your oil tank is not up for renewal for another five or 10 years. That's a tough choice to make when you've put \$5,000 into a new oil tank or \$3,500.

Giving the longer window allows people to plan for that savings themselves because sometimes it requires changes to your electricity system in your house, upgrading your panels and things like that. In other cases, they may be able to go bigger and put a central heating unit in, which is by far the most effective savings for the homeowners. This is good for the environment from a climate change perspective but also really good for your pocketbook.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

What is the status of Natural Resources Canada application for super-fast chargers?

**B. DAVIS:** Good. It's been approved from that standpoint so we're happy with respect to that. You know, obviously, we need to be expanding our network at all times, because one of the biggest concerns that people have is range anxiety with respect to this. Even though 95 per cent of your charging is going to take place in your home, which is your cheapest charging option, people still have that range anxiety.

So the more chargers that you have out there and the more people see cars and trucks utilizing those and as that supply network comes up, we will have more infrastructure as well. I mean, there is opportunity to expand the network for fast-charging stations in the budget, this budget, as well as I'm hopeful that we'll be able to get longer term on that. There is still a program open for businesses to apply like hotels, motels that can apply through Hydro, through that program that they can get money to avail of charging stations as well.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** I'll turn things over to MHA Dinn – 5.1.01.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Sorry, 3.2.01, Climate Change.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

According to the parliamentary budget officer report in November 2022, that the climate change cost the Canadian economy in GDP \$20 billion. I'm just wondering, has there been any study or impact of climate change on the Newfoundland economy and its effect on our GDP? In terms of where there's lost wages, you look at Port aux Basques which is still recovering. You look at anything at all, whether it's road repair, or making infrastructure more resilient or helping people move from areas. I'm just

wondering, has there been any assessment by the provincial government on how climate change has impacted or cost our economy?

**B. DAVIS:** I'll turn it over to Susan right away, but I will say that you're not wrong. There is a major cost associated with inaction. That's why we're moving as fast as we can on many fronts to reduce that inaction that may – if you don't make decisions, that's the worst possible situation you can be in. We've got to improve on a bunch of different fronts and that's why we're, as we say, fighting on all those fronts so we can reduce that, but I'll turn it over to Susan who can give you some more insight into the numbers based on that.

**S. SQUIRES:** We haven't done a complete count, as in one number, but certainly there have been lots of one-off, whether you look at programming to switching someone from oil or whether you look at responding to disasters, whether DFFA submissions or response to forest fires last summer, floods, obviously, our work on flood-risk mapping, the need to flood-risk forecasting. All of these things are a result of changing climate.

So we have certainly a lot of numbers that add up to quite a big number in our efforts to deal with climate change or respond to emergencies that have been exacerbated by climate change. Do we have one number that totals that? It would probably be quite a staggering number and generally the consensus across the country and many other countries is that the cost of doing nothing is well beyond the cost of action.

**J. DINN:** Would it be in the purview of this department to do that analysis of the impact of climate change on the economy on our GDP or is that something that will be the purview of the Department of Finance?

**B. DAVIS:** I think we could work with the Department of Finance in that process but it would come from the Department of

Finance in how they would ascertain all of those access.

I think it's a valid question you're asking. It's a very good question. It's a number that I would like to have myself so, I think, that's something that we could try to –

**J. DINN:** I'll formally request it.

**B. DAVIS:** Well, you just did. That's awesome.

Thank you.

**J. DINN:** I was looking through these sections here, Chair. If I'm looking at it correctly, the section on Climate Change, that seems to be the only area that seems to have a decline in the overall budget, if I'm reading it correctly, from \$4,259,500 down to \$2,555,600. If I look at any other section or heading, there seems an increase, even if it's modest. I'm just wondering why the decline?

**B. DAVIS:** A very good question. I can turn it over to the people who would know the numbers a little better than that.

I think it's just how it's being reflected. There's no decline, there's actually an increase in Climate Change money that we've put in on all sides of it. It's just where it's been placed. I think the oil to electric program has been removed from here to the next tab, which would be Federal-Provincial Programs, or the tab after that.

I'll pass it over to Susan to answer that.

**J. DINN:** It's not just a simple case of a lack of priority being placed?

**B. DAVIS:** No, absolutely not. It's a very good question you asked. There's \$100 million-plus over the next four years in the low-carbon economy in this, plus another \$67 million or so in challenge fund money there as well or oil to electric funding. It's just where this is represented on this

particular 3.1.01, it's over here where you would you see a bigger increase in the next subsequent tab.

I'll ask Susan to just explain that a little bit better than I did.

**S. SQUIRES:** If you look at a drop of \$4.2 million down to \$2.5 million, we had budgeted \$2 million for the oil to electric program which went well beyond that. That's your decrease because that program has become a cost-shared program with the federal government and is reflected in 3.2.01 and funded to a much higher degree.

**B. DAVIS:** You're seeing the increase from \$4.2 million to \$9 million, that's because we went in at a \$2 million ask and it's somewhere north of \$8 million at this point. It was a very successful program that we invested in even more after the budget.

**J. DINN:** Okay. I just wanted reassurance that this is not indicating that somehow it's deemphasized.

**B. DAVIS:** No, absolutely.

**J. DINN:** How many performance credits were purchased by industry in the past year and how much money did that raise?

**B. DAVIS:** Good question. I think Susan has that at her fingertips there now. If not, we'll be able to get it for you, but I think she has it there.

**J. DINN:** Sure.

**S. SQUIRES:** We publicly share this information and we share one document that is how much each emitter emits, another document that is the annual outcomes of the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act*. For example, in this past 2021 – we're just we're just getting 2022 – there were 14 regulated facilities and the total number of performance credits issued were \$551,913. The number of performance credits submitted for

compliance were \$113,149. The number of active performance credits was just over a million.

The companies buy credits among each other. They can request other emitters to sell them credits, that's how that market works. If they have to buy credits from the minister, that's when they purchase credits from us and for some companies a section of those credits have to be purchased at four times the cost factor due to the compliance that we've laid out.

So if we get that revenue, it goes into the greenhouse gas fund and that fund in 2021, the audited statements were \$167,840. So still small. It's triple of what it was the year before and we expect it to go up as the requirements to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions continue to go up.

**B. DAVIS:** While we're ratcheting down on the industries, that number is going to go up quite substantially.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

So if they're buying credits, is that like buying a permit or permission to pollute then?

**B. DAVIS:** No, but Susan will give the best definition of this.

**S. SQUIRES:** No, if you've earned a credit it means you overachieved your target. So you've reduced greenhouse gas emissions and we give you a benefit of that. So they've basically monetized the fact that they've done that and it helps them recruit their capital costs of doing that investment.

The money that goes into the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, there is an advisory council we just set-up under that fund and they have to advise the minister on how that money has to be spent. Under the legislation, it has to be spent on greenhouse gas reduction programming that goes beyond the compliance targets the

companies already have. It's not just for the large emitters, anyone who falls within the sector, so it could be a smaller mine, for example, that doesn't have a target or it could be manufacturing company, for example, they can apply, they will be able to apply in the future and submit a greenhouse gas reduction proposal.

So the money earned has to be used then to actually reduce emissions.

**J. DINN:** Just to make sure I'm clear, the company that does well, they have the credit, but the company that doesn't do well can buy that credit from that company. Am I understanding that correctly?

**S. SQUIRES:** That's correct but the emission reduction has been done by somebody. It might not be by the company, it's obviously not by the company that bought the credits, but it's been achieved by the company that's earned the credit.

**J. DINN:** If I may, what would be the incentive then to the company that's buying the credit if another one is doing – it's still allowing one company then or companies to do the polluting, someone else is doing the work, they'll just buy the credits. Is there any incentive to make – that's where I'm going with that.

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, so and I'll turn it back to Susan in a second, but those credits are going to get more and more expensive over time as well so it's forcing companies to try to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions as well. In some cases, it may be an industry that can't reduce it at a certain level any more than they've reduced it so, over time, they're going to be paying but that allows other companies that can reduce further to use that money to reinvest in reducing greenhouse gas emissions

As Susan did say that the greenhouse gas emissions on the overall are reducing, it may be extra reductions in a particular company A and particular company B may

not have reduced it – they're still reducing it but not to the level they need to. So that's part of the reason it's set up that way rather than pushing companies directly out of operation. Because that's essentially what would happen if they didn't have an ability to get compliance by purchasing compliance.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**S. SQUIRES:** One other key feature of our system which is not in all systems, to be honest, is we have an on-site reduction requirement of a certain percentage of their compliance: 20 per cent. If they do not reduce on that, they have to actually buy credits at four times the cost.

They obviously can buy credits for the other 80 per cent at the cost that they're able to negotiate with other people who have earned them, but there is an incentive to reduce and that helps make the case for the capital investment. What we're seeing in many companies is they might have to buy credits for a while and then there's a large capital investment that kind of does a step decrease in their greenhouse gas emissions. Then they pay that off over time and then they'll be able to do another capital investment.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Before I go back to MHA Forsey, obviously, a three-hour allotment for our Estimates tonight, we're going to go over that by a bit so I just want to get the feeling of the Committee – are we okay to continue on?

**B. DAVIS:** Mr. Chair, I think we've only got one left after Climate Change anyway.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**B. DAVIS:** We're fine to go on rather than trying to get everyone back again if we needed to. I don't think it's going to be much more than 20 minutes or anything to move

past this anyway. I look to my colleagues on the other side who are asking the questions. I'll try to do a better job of answering.

**P. FORSEY:** The 15-minute break and the five minutes lead time, will that add to our time?

**CLERK:** No, the break doesn't count. We have three hours and it was 10 after before we started so (inaudible) –

**P. FORSEY:** So we got an extra 20 minutes anyway.

**B. DAVIS:** That's fine.

**P. FORSEY:** All right, let's go.

**B. DAVIS:** Let's do it.

**CHAIR:** 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive.

**P. FORSEY:** 3.1.02, Salaries: Salaries are being increased by \$325,700. Can you please detail what is happening there?

**B. DAVIS:** That's two new positions that are 50-50 cost shared with the federal government with respect to this administration for the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund and Climate Change Challenge Fund.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Under 10, Grants and Subsidies, last year \$17 million was budgeted but \$7 million was spent. Can you provide some info on which program and how many?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, I can. I'm going to try to be as succinct as possible on this because I know I get the look from you every now and again and it half frightens me.

Essentially, the reason why the revised is down versus budget is just the ability to complete the work in the time. That is going to carry over – as you see, it carries over to \$56,700,000 in Estimates for this year so

there is going to be a significant amount of work done this year with respect to this.

So that comes in a couple of different ways. There is a \$17 million carry-over through the Low Carbon Economy Fund 1. Then Low Carbon Economy Fund 2 is \$14.9 million, so almost \$15 million. And then the Oil to Electric Heat Pump Affordability Program is close to \$15 million. That is where you're seeing the changeover but the reduction is based there just on the flow through of work being done. I'll use the example of the MUN boiler project, that's not complete yet but once that is complete, that's going to divest \$10 million or \$12 million out of the fund. So you'll see that come through next Estimates.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Revenue - Federal: Can you please explain this line item? Last year, \$2 million was collected but now it is increasing to \$23 million.

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that's good for us; that's excellent. It is a good news story; \$23 million that's going to \$4.8 million for the Low Carbon Economy Fund 1. Low Carbon Economy Fund 2, the new fund, that starts this year as well, is \$6.2 million. Then the Oil to Electric Heat Pump Affordability Program is about \$12.6 million. That is all going to enter the province this year and, hopefully, that will all be spent as well because that means we're getting the uptake that we want and I think we'll get.

**P. FORSEY:** All right, good.

3.2.01.

**B. DAVIS:** 3.2.01, okay.

**P. FORSEY:** Salaries: Last year there was a salary savings of \$306,600. Can you explain why?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that is lower due to the delay in the recruitment of vacant positions within that division. Partially offset by some

of the increases that we talked about in many of the other sections before – salary increases that are negotiated and recognition bonuses.

**P. FORSEY:** So that position is still vacant?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, and you'll see that number has gone back to a more reasonable number of what it has been historically.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Grants and Subsidies: Where does the \$159,000 go? What program was this?

**B. DAVIS:** The \$159,000 goes to two areas here. The conservation corps – they do environmental and climate change education grant that they get; that's \$147,000. Then \$12,200 is the Eastern Canadian Premiers secretariat, which is funding that comes out of here that is a secretariat that we contribute to but we get far more value than the \$12,200 because provinces all contribute to that.

**P. FORSEY:** Revenue - Federal: \$175,000 was expected but nothing collected. Why?

**B. DAVIS:** Due to we didn't have an agreement with the federal government at this point to hire staff that would be responsible for expanding the Natural Areas System Plan that existed, so we expect that will be spent this year.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** It was just a timing issue.

**P. FORSEY:** Under the Revenue - Provincial, despite \$226,000 being budgeted, \$189,500 was collected. Can you explain that?

**B. DAVIS:** So there was no cost recovery for the Natural Areas program, no agreement in place. So that equates to \$39,500 of that, which is more than what the difference is, but it's partially offset by

higher revenue from Mistaken Point which is about \$2,500.

**P. FORSEY:** Good.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA Dinn, anything further on 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive?

**J. DINN:** Sure thing. Thank you, Chair.

Under 3.1.01, Climate Change, I noticed the minister earlier talked about the CO2 greenhouse emissions due to vehicular traffic. So are there any plans to ramp up the electrification of the provincial government vehicle fleet and maybe to provide funding to municipalities to ramp up the electrification of their fleets?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

The municipalities have the ability to apply within the federal government envelop as well. So they can do that themselves. Although we wouldn't be opposed to working with them and we have worked with them in the past on things like that.

With respect to your question about electrification of government fleet, I hate to use the words "stay tuned," but, I mean, obviously when we purchase vehicles, there will be a component of that that will be electric vehicles as well. We're going to try to lead by example on some of this stuff. So where we can, we're going to try to do that. That's not in our shop, particularly, but the policy and the direction from us would be to Transportation and Infrastructure that when we purchase vehicles, there's a percentage of them need to be electric vehicles, if we're going to hit our own targets.

It's no good buying 100 vehicles and none of them being electric vehicles. There needs to be a portion of them electric vehicles, especially knowing full well that we have the infrastructure in some of the government buildings and have the ability to put them in

government buildings and it actually saves us money.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Is it possible to quantify the carbon footprint of the provincial government and, if so, what are its projections for either its expansion or reduction?

**B. DAVIS:** A very good question and I'll try to keep this succinct as well.

The provincial government is captured in the entire province's greenhouse gas complement. I don't think we have it broken out separately, but it is included with the rest of the province.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

How are we currently doing on implementing the 45 actions that were to take place by 2024 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions according to the Climate Change Action Plan?

**B. DAVIS:** Very good question.

I said in my preamble, I think we're at 67 per cent, but we're probably more than that because the remaining 33 per cent, we're at varying stages of the completion on that. Even that being said, we're in the process of working on our new plan because we're going to be even more aggressive with – I want better targets and more tangible targets for us to achieve so it'll be almost like a report card of success from our standpoint. I know some people don't like that, but I believe that's important to have measurable targets and shoot to achieve them. If you don't achieve them, you have to be able to explain why we haven't achieved them.

**J. DINN:** In a CBC Radio interview that you, I and the interim Leader of the Opposition took part in, you mentioned that you were –

**B. DAVIS:** What an interview.

**J. DINN:** It was going to come back, you know, eventually.

You mentioned that you were in favour of a just transition plan for workers. I'm just wondering what actions can we expect to see in the coming year on that front?

**B. DAVIS:** Thank you, very good question.

**J. DINN:** I'm assuming you haven't changed your mind.

**B. DAVIS:** No, no, absolutely not. As I've said many times before, diversification of the economy is an important piece, giving people the options to have a career change is an opportunity both from not just my department, as Labour Minister or Environment Minister, but also from a training perspective from IPGS, from IET, as well as any training that we can offer people from an economic development standpoint to train themselves to be ready for the new green economy that's coming, whether it be hydrogen or whether it be technologically driven initiatives that way. That's also going to be an education standpoint, both post-secondary and K-to-2 system.

So we're working on all fronts because we understand it's not just one department that's going to be responsible for trying to develop the economy and develop the training required for individuals to meet the needs for that changing economy as we get there.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Last question I guess I have and it's in 3.2.01, Natural Areas, you mentioned WERAC and the protected areas earlier, Home for Nature.

**B. DAVIS:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** I'm asking in this case specifically about a piece of land between the southwest and northwest Gander River, they call it Charlie's Place.

**B. DAVIS:** Okay.

**J. DINN:** I'm just wondering of updates because that involved the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper and I know there have been a number of the Indigenous groups, the Qalipu have been involved and I think they're looking at applying for status as a protected area as well. So I'm just wondering, any update on that?

**B. DAVIS:** So I can give you a brief update on it and then I'll turn it over to Susan as well who can expand on it a little further.

My understanding is that Indigenous organization or government has gone to the federal government looking for an IPCA for that particular area, Indigenous protected area. We're awaiting what the federal government will say to that perspective. I know that we've been involved in conversations, as I said earlier, we've been in consultation with Indigenous organizations and governments on the Home for Nature and their priorities with respect to that.

So I'll turn it over to Susan if she give you a little bit of an update on where we're to from that perspective.

**S. SQUIRES:** We've met with the Indigenous organizations on the Island since Christmas around Home for Nature and their priorities. So they have had an opportunity to speak to us about not just the Home for Nature sites but other sites and areas of interest, which have included Charlie's Place. Since those meetings, they've also met with WERAC and talked about Charlie's Place specifically.

Charlie's Place is not in the Home for Nature sites and regularly WERAC receives applications for other sites in addition to ones we might have already identified. So there's a process that WERAC has to go through to collect information on a site that might be proposed by anyone in the province and then get to a point where

they're able to submit that recommendation to government about what they'd like to do.

So they have had recent meetings and are taking some of the feedback from Indigenous organizations.

**J. DINN:** If I understand, they've approached the federal government on this to have an IPCA set-up. Is the province supporting them in this application?

**B. DAVIS:** I guess we have to see what the federal government comes back with respect to – my understanding – and it is a new program that the federal government has put in place – is that Indigenous organizations will come forward with land that they would want to protect and the federal government would be involved in the protection of that particular parcel or parcels of land that they would bring forward.

In this case, I think that the land is not necessarily part of land that they currently have – for lack of a better term – ownership of or stake claim to. Maybe I'm not saying it the correct way in that context, but I'm anxiously awaiting to see what the federal government comes back with. I understand that Corner Brook Pulp and Paper has met with this group as well and tried to find some solutions to areas of land that's been in, I guess, part of their cutting rights for well over 100 years with respect to that land.

So I think they're trying to work through those processes. I'm sure there'll be some process that will come a bit clearer over time in this situation.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

If the Committee is ready for the question, shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.2.01 carried.

**CHAIR:** I'll ask the Clerk to call the final set of subheads, please.

**CLERK:** 6.1.01, Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Review.

**CHAIR:** Shall 6.1.01 carry?

MHA Forsey.

**P. FORSEY:** Some general questions just to start with this one.

How many review commissioners are there at this point?

**B. DAVIS:** Just give me one second and I'll get that for you.

There are 15 positions at the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Review Division. There are 12 that are filled and three that are in process of being filled.

**P. FORSEY:** How many part time? How many full time?

**B. DAVIS:** I think everything is full time there right now. That was a decision we made a number of years ago, as a government, that we thought it would be much more focused, rather than have part-time review commissioners, have them full time, pay them a full-time wage so they can work full time on this. We've seen a reduction in the number of applications over time. When we're at our full complement, we see those reductions being very stark for what they used to be.

**P. FORSEY:** How many applications are currently on file requesting review hearings?

**B. DAVIS:** Two hundred and fourteen new applications have been submitted as of March 17.

**P. FORSEY:** The minister said last year there weren't any plans for more commissioners and that you would assess if that backlog would be cleared.

Is the current complement of review commissioners adequate to handle the workload in a timely manner?

**B. DAVIS:** The answer to that, I think, is yes, based on when we have our full complement. As I said earlier, we have three that we need to replace, that is in the process of being replaced – sorry, two that we need to replace.

So once we get full complement there, I think that we move through the files in a timely manner and move as fast as we can through them.

**P. FORSEY:** So there are plans to increase the number?

**B. DAVIS:** Well, the plan is just to replace the complement that is there. Someone moved into a new position and that left a vacancy, as has been talked about before, and I think our deputy minister can jump in as well.

**V. SNOW:** Just to add to what the minister said, there are five positions. Two of those have been rotationally vacant for a little while, so that's part of the reason we've had this backlog. Very shortly, those five positions will all be full. It's in the final processes of establishing – we are putting people in those two positions and then we feel confident that it should be enough to handle the workload.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Last year, the minister said he would look into the reasons why applications weren't

withdrawn. How many applications have been withdrawn?

**B. DAVIS:** Just give me one second. There were 18 cases withdrawn.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Are you now aware of reasons why?

**B. DAVIS:** I don't know specifically why those 18 were withdrawn. It could be for a variety of reasons. It could be that they found a solution. Obviously, anything could happen with respect them, the situation changing, passing away or anything along those lines. Without that being the case, they may have found a solution through WorkplaceNL at the time and may have withdrawn it themselves.

I can't speak to why they've withdrawn each of these applications. I could probably figure out why the 18 of them were withdrawn and get that back to you; I just don't know it off the top of my head why they were withdrawn, those 18 were. It could be a variety of different reasons, but I'll get back to you on that.

**P. FORSEY:** That's fine.

How many hearings are currently scheduled?

**B. DAVIS:** There are 167 hearings scheduled or held in this fiscal year; 164 of them have happened; three more are scheduled prior to March 31.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

So how many are being held each month?

**B. DAVIS:** An average of 14.

**P. FORSEY:** Fourteen?

**B. DAVIS:** It ranges per month but, on the average of the year, it's 14.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

How long after the hearing date is a written decision given?

**B. DAVIS:** It really depends on the decision. It depends on how complex it is. It could be fairly quick from my understanding from the chief review commissioner. Sometimes it could be very quick and sometimes it could be a little bit longer, depending on the complexity of each case. I don't want to make a generalization to say that it would be a day or two, or a week or a month.

I could get some information on what the average time frame would be of a case, but that wouldn't give you a really good indication. There could be a case that could be three months to do a review to get a report back or there could be a case that could be done in a day or two.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

**B. DAVIS:** So it really depends on the complexity of it. Most times when it comes Review Division, it is going to be a very complex case. They don't come with the easy ones because they're usually handled fairly quickly through WorkplaceNL.

**P. FORSEY:** How is the injured workers' fund at WorkplaceNL been impacted by this year's markets?

**B. DAVIS:** As of right now, it has been impacted – I think last year we said it was about 132.2 per cent funded. It is about 116 per cent, so it took a pretty big hit in the market. That is estimated right now at this point. By the end of the fiscal year, we don't know where that's going to be. Obviously it changes with the market.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Are all the recommendations from last year's statutory review implemented?

**B. DAVIS:** There were 48 recommendations, as I said before; 27 of them are complete; 21 of them are outstanding; 10 of those 21 are operational; 9 of them are with WorkplaceNL; one of them are with the Review Division; and then there are 11 with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador that we're working through. Some are complex and it takes a bit more effort. Some are financial in terms that we're looking at. Obviously, with the impact to the Injury Fund, we want to make sure it is sustainable for the longer term. We don't want to have what happened in the late '80s, early '90s with WorkplaceNL.

**P. FORSEY:** So can you give us a list of what has been implemented and what hasn't?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, we can give you a copy of all the recommendations: the ones that have been implemented and that ones that are outstanding.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

Under Salaries, last year there was salary savings of \$152,800. Why?

**B. DAVIS:** Vacancy factor.

**P. FORSEY:** Did this vacancy impact the operations?

**B. DAVIS:** As I said before, we would sooner be at full capacity but obviously – and it is not the same person that was vacant the entire time. We have filled those positions. These are fairly skilled positions so once they get in there and they get some experience, they want to try to move to something that would be – whether it was more pay or different style of work, it gives them that option. So we're hoping that full complement will be coming very shortly.

**P. FORSEY:** Transportation and Communications: Last year there was \$30,000 in savings. How was this achieved?

**B. DAVIS:** Just less cases and less travelling for those cases.

**P. FORSEY:** Professional Services: Last year there was \$55,000 in savings.

**B. DAVIS:** Lower review commissioner costs.

**P. FORSEY:** Purchased Services: Last year there was \$10,300 in savings. Why?

**B. DAVIS:** Lower meeting costs. I'm trying to be quick for you.

**P. FORSEY:** That's good.

Revenue - Provincial: Can you please explain where this revenue comes from and what accounts for the decrease last year?

**B. DAVIS:** That comes in through the Injury Fund. So it's just an in and out, essentially. The Injury Fund covers the cost of the Review Division, as well as covers the cost of WorkplaceNL.

**P. FORSEY:** Okay.

I'm done.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**J. DINN:** Can I have his time? No.

**CLERK:** MHA Dinn, 6.1.01, please.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

A few questions. I appreciate your brevity.

**B. DAVIS:** I'll try to keep it going.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Quickly, with regard to the injured workers' fund impacted by the markets, you said it was at 132 per cent and it took a hit. I'm just wondering, who manages it? What is the asset mix in that fund?

I use that in the context of the \$2 billion of the Atlantic Accord money that was put in the teachers' fund way back when – 2006 I think it was – only to see it wiped out. A lot of it is because, at the time, they didn't change the asset mix. They did not de-risk the fund. I'm just wondering here, if the fund is at 132 per cent, was it de-risked or is it shielded from the volatilities of the market?

**B. DAVIS:** I'd like to be able to answer and say with 100 per cent certainty the answer – I can get the answer of what's actually in the fund. That's no problem. I know it's a managed fund. It's quite an extensive fund. I think it's a \$1.5-billion fund.

**J. DINN:** By the government?

**B. DAVIS:** Not by government, by WorkplaceNL and I think it's the board that manages that through a fund management firm. So they've seen some great success, obviously; 132.2 per cent of funding is great news, considering where they've come from, being under 100 per cent funding, underfunded. So 116 is quite a dip as an estimated. I always like to see where it's going to end at the end of the year because, you know, obviously, things change in a day in the markets and it could be significantly different tomorrow versus what I say today. So I'm couched by what I say in that perspective. But I can get you the information of what the mix is.

**J. DINN:** I'd be more concerned – as long as it is de-risked and shielded, otherwise.

**B. DAVIS:** That's right.

**J. DINN:** With the recommendations of the statutory review – any update on the recommendation for expanded worker representation in WorkplaceNL? Any update on that recommendation?

**B. DAVIS:** Yeah, so that's been approved from our standpoint. I think that's working through the process with the Federation of Labour to get that staffed up. We

understand that the calls from the workers who would need representation, it would be more than those that are required from the employers. It used to be a balance of that, but there is significantly more investment put in the employee side versus the employer side.

I think there are a couple of representatives for the employer and I think now we've expanded that to three more, potentially, in that area. Whatever the recommendation was at the time – I'm trying to remember the number, I just don't have it at the top of my head – it's been implemented.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

I understand government is not planning to raise the income replacement rate from 85 to 90 per cent. Why not?

**B. DAVIS:** There's no decision made on that at this point. We haven't said yes or no to that at this point; we're still evaluating that. Obviously, we're looking at all options with that. There's some actuarial work that WorkplaceNL is looking at that provides some insight to us. But other than that, there's been no decision made on that.

**J. DINN:** You may not be able to answer this one now, but would it be possible to get a breakdown of the number of people receiving workers' compensation by industry?

**B. DAVIS:** Yes, I can give it to you by industry, and I have it right here. I would read it out to you, but I think for brevity's sake I won't read it out to you, I'll just give it to you.

**J. DINN:** Both of us.

Thank you.

**B. DAVIS:** So yes.

**J. DINN:** You're learning young Padawan.

**B. DAVIS:** Wax on, wax off.

**J. DINN:** Can we expect any further changes this coming year as to how medical reporting is done on disease claims?

**B. DAVIS:** I know that WorkplaceNL is always looking at trying to improve the processes there, whether it be from a technological perspective or whether it be just a consultation perspective. I know they're always looking at options. I can't speak to whether there will be improvements. I know that we're always looking at ways to improve the operation at WorkplaceNL.

Obviously, there's going to be a new CEO in the coming weeks. I don't know that person because I haven't seen the list yet, but I expect that person is going to want to put their stamp and make the organization that much better, both from an injury perspective and for both employers and employees that share in the benefits of WorkplaceNL.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Last year, government expanded coverage of cancer and cardiovascular conditions for firefighters, but those who battle forest fires were left out. Is that a gap that government is planning to fill in the coming year?

**B. DAVIS:** As I said at the time, we were going to look at that option. That was something that was never raised to us at the time. We're looking into that. But there is a difference, as I said at the time, there is a slight difference to what carcinogens they would face based on going into – this is the studies that I've read and heard and been presented to by firefighters as well as WorkplaceNL, that there are differences based on what you would face going into a home or a building that you would not face when you go into a forest fire in a forest.

I'm not saying it is less safe or more safe, it's just different carcinogens that you would face and the cancers would be potentially

different from that. I'm not saying we're not looking at it; we definitely are based on the concerns raised by NAPE at the time, but that was the first we heard of it at that time.

**J. DINN:** The last question, Chair.

When can we expect to see movement on creating an occupational health clinic, which was recommended by the Health Accord?

**B. DAVIS:** As we've said many times with the Health Accord, we're working our way through that. That's something that WorkplaceNL and other are looking at as we speak – probably not as we speak at 8:30 in the evening, but I'm guessing that during this time of the year they are looking at that as well.

The Health Accord is a great document that we're really committed to working with, as a government. I know that anything we can implement, the quicker the better on most of the Health Accord is where we want to be.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

That's it, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

If the Committee is ready for the question, shall 6.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 6.1.01 carried.

**CLERK:** 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 Environment and Climate Change, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Climate Change carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Environment and Climate Change carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** If you wanted to have a closing remark MHA Forsey.

**P. FORSEY:** I would just like to thank the department for coming in and thank the minister for all the answers and that sort of stuff. I do appreciate, on our side, when we call your offices, we get the answers or at least they're being worked on, we get the answers in adequate time and we get what we can. We really appreciate that, I really do. I would just like to say thank you for that on our behalf.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, MHA Forsey.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** I certainly want to thank my favourite Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

**B. DAVIS:** You're my favourite Dinn.

**J. DINN:** And the staff who certainly make him look good, I fully realize that it is the

staff behind us that do a lot of the heavy lifting.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What a job that is.

**J. DINN:** I know you probably have a pretty good idea of what type of questions we're going to ask, but there are always going to be some that are going to put you on your spot. I don't know if I want to be in that position, at the moment, but thank you for the information and thank you to the Committee for sitting so late.

**CHAIR:** Minister, a few final remarks?

**B. DAVIS:** I would be remiss if I didn't say thank you to my colleagues for being here today and thank you for the questions. I don't think people understand how important Estimates are to the whole process. I think it really delves into the options that government has in each and every department.

I thank both Opposition Members for being so candid with their questions and giving us an opportunity to try to provide the best answers that we can. As I've said, we're going to give you the information that we get for you. I have the books here for the Estimates to get to you.

I would like to say thank you to our staff here. You're not wrong when you said, Pleaman, that we've got staff that answer questions, regardless of the time they come in and try to get you the answers that they can. Sometimes it's not the answer that you'd like but it is the true answer. I want to thank them for the great work that they do trying to make me look good, and that's a tall order in some cases, for sure, but they do a great job. I really thank them for it. I couldn't do what I do without them.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**B. DAVIS:** And thank you, Mr. Chair. What a Chair.

**CHAIR:** I will close off by thanking the folks down at the Broadcast Centre and to Bobbi and to the Committee. Again, it was a real education in Environment and Climate Change. I enjoyed the evening.

Just to let you know that the next meeting of the Resource Committee will be Monday, April 3, at 6 p.m.

I look for a mover for adjournment.

**L. STOYLES:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** I knew that.

Moved by the MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Thank you everyone, have a great evening.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.