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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on
Resources**

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Department of Environment and Climate Change

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Environment and Climate Change

Chair: Scott Reid, MHA

Vice-Chair: Craig Pardy, MHA

Members: Pleaman Forsey, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Jordan Brown, MHA
Perry Trimper, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Kim Hawley George (A)

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
Jennifer Torrance, Departmental Controller
Debbie Marnell, Director of Communications
Randy Simms, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Hon. Fred Hutton, MHA, Minister of Housing
Hon. Sarah Stoodley, MHA, Minister of Digital Government and Service NL
Hon. Krista Lynn Howell, MHA, Minister of Education
James Dinn, MHA
Lela Evans, MHA
Paul Lane, MHA
David Hamlyn, Government Members' Caucus
David Porter, Official Opposition Caucus
Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus
Gerrie Smith, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sarah Stoodley, MHA for Mount Scio, substitutes for Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Krista Lynn Howell, MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, James Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West, for a portion of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lela Evans, MHA for Torngat Mountains, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West, for a portion of the meeting.

The Committee met at 6 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Trimper): Okay, I'll call this meeting to order.

Thank you very much.

Welcome to the Estimates within the resource sector for the Department of Environment and Climate Change, and Labour.

My name is Perry Trimper, I'm the MHA for Lake Melville. I'll be your Chair this evening.

I don't need to be nominated, do I? I am the Chair. Okay, that's good.

Let's start with our Committee, and we have some substitutions so I'm just going to confirm our substitutions this evening.

Substituting for the Member for Labrador West, we have the Member for St. John's Centre, and then once we're concluded with

Labour, the Member for Torngat Mountains, correct?

Thank you.

We also have, substituting for the Member for Mount Pearl North, the Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, who is on her way here, I'm told. We'll see her shortly. We do have quorum so that's why I've started.

The Member for Placentia - St. Mary's is being substituted this evening by the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island; and then, finally, the Member for St. George's - Humber has been substituted by the Member for Mount Scio.

I'm seeing that's all confirmed. We'll proceed.

First of all, we're going to tackle Labour, so those that are here for that we can do that and then we can excuse you later.

We'll be looking for a break about halfway through for about 10 minutes. We'll see how we feel. If we want to keep going, we'll keep going, but I'll tentatively look at the clock in about an hour and a half from now.

For those of you who are new, some who are new to this, just make sure that you're speaking into the microphone. I'm going to try to identify the speaker each time so just give me a second and I'll identify you and wave as well. Broadcast is looking at you and once they've got the names connected, you'll see your tally light come on and then you can speak, so we can get this all nicely recorded.

Each time you'll just say your name and your position. Sometimes when we're going back and forth it's not completely necessary, but it does help just for the recording of everything.

They say not to make any adjustments to the chairs. I've already done that so I've broken that rule, but anyway try to return the

chair as you found it. Don't play with the microphone, we should have had that on here. The water coolers are right behind me on either side; washrooms, I think everybody knows where those are.

So to my right, I'm going to ask the Committee Members and the substitutions, caucus employees, please introduce yourselves.

I'll start right here with Mr. Forsey. You'll get the attention of Broadcast and then we'll just go down and come back along.

P. FORSEY: Pleaman Forsey, MHA for Exploits.

D. PORTER: David Porter, Opposition Office.

P. LANE: Paul Lane, MHA for the District of Mount Pearl - Southlands.

Mr. Chair, before we start, I'm not a Member of the Committee.

CHAIR: Understood.

P. LANE: But in the past, independent Members have been given the opportunity to participate. So I'll be asking leave of the Committee to do so again this year as I have for the past nine years.

CHAIR: Right on. I have that on my little script and we're going to bring that up in a minute or two.

P. LANE: Oh, okay I thought you were –

CHAIR: It's okay.

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

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

CHAIR: Mr. Hamlyn.

D. HAMLYN: Dave Hamlyn, Government Members' Office.

C. PARDY: Craig Pardy from the historic District of Bonavista.

S. STOODLEY: Sarah Stoodley from the economic powerhouse District of Mount Scio.

F. HUTTON: Fred Hutton from Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

I will now turn to the minister and his department officials.

B. DAVIS: Bernie Davis, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I have the pleasure of representing the beautiful District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

V. SNOW: Valerie Snow, Deputy Minister, Environment and Climate Change.

J. TORRAVILLE: Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller.

Y. SCOTT: Yvonne Scott, ADM, Labour.

D. MARNELL: Debbie Marnell, Director of Communications.

R. SIMMS: Randy Simms, EA to the Minister.

S. SQUIRES: Susan Squires, ADM for Climate Change.

T. KELLY: Tara Kelly, ADM for Environment.

CHAIR: Thank you, everyone.

I believe the Clerk has distributed the minutes from the last meeting and I'd ask if you've had a chance to – I'm sure you've studied them in great detail. If there are any comments, please let me know, any errors

or omissions. Otherwise, I'll ask for a mover to approve those minutes.

P. FORSEY: So moved.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I saw the Member for Bonavista and the Member for Exploits seconded them.

Thank you very much.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: So we will go through the Estimates and, as I said, we're going to start with Labour. As per the request by Mr. Lane, I would put it to the Committee, does anyone have any objection to him being provided with a 10-minute interval at the completion of the heading review?

Is that fine with everyone? So seeing no objection, we'll do that.

Thank you for your co-operation.

What we're going to do is we'll proceed first of all with the minister. Him and I had a little chat beforehand. So he's going to have his remarks right now, confined to Labour, and then when we start the Environment and Climate Change section, he'll do something else.

B. DAVIS: It's okay to start with Labour first?

CHAIR: Yeah. I think you've got good support there.

B. DAVIS: Okay with the rest of the Committee?

CHAIR: Is that all right? We'll do Labour first?

Welcome, Madame.

Let's just put you on the record here, so this is –

P. FORSEY: What are we doing? What did you say, we're going to go with Labour first?

CHAIR: So there are two sections we want to review tonight. There's Environment and Climate Change and there are officials here with the department of Labour. So to just allow the Labour folks to do their thing and then leave, we're proposing to do Labour first. That's all. Everything's still going to be done, we're just going to switch the order as it appears in the Estimate books.

B. DAVIS: Like we did last year for you, Pleaman.

P. FORSEY: Fair enough.

CHAIR: And if I could ask Broadcast to just turn to my immediate right, please, and turn on the tally light and she'll introduce herself.

K. HOWELL: Hello, Krista Howell, MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

We'll get the minister to speak and then the first responder will have 15 minutes. Then after the first round, we'll go back through everyone for 10-minute periods until we've got no further questions and then we'll move on.

We're going to seek an agreement on each section of subheadings, correct? We'll vote on those and then we'll go on to the next one. Okay.

So I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK (Hawley George): The Department of Environment and Climate Change, 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 inclusive, Labour.

CHAIR: I'll turn to the minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to break my comments up, as you said earlier, and deal with Labour first to help speed things along. I'm going to keep my remarks short and anyone who knows from last year, they were very short.

I am pleased to say there was an increased labour stability in '23-'24 during which time we only had two strikes that occurred.

The Labour Relations Division, which provides conciliation support services for unions and employers, has about a 95 per cent success rate. This is very positive news for us. The division also provides assistance in the renewal of most of the construction industry collective agreements. This bodes well for the construction projects that may be on the horizon, as we will talk about most likely later on in this evening's festivities.

Via the role of a first collective agreement mediator, the department has been instrumental in assisting newly unionized work environments achieve their first collective agreement; assistance through the grievance mediation program was also provided to employers and unions who required help resolving workplace grievances. This program has a success rate greater than 80 per cent. These services, in addition to others, are provided at no cost to the parties.

Obviously, one of the major opportunities that we look at within our department is the minimum wage and minimum wage review. So every two years, the provincial government has this legislation to conduct a province's current minimum wage rate, a review of that, as well as any adjustment processes.

Last month, we concluded the online engagement regarding the current minimum wage rate and the adjustment process. This process provides an opportunity for the public, as well as the employers, labourers and stakeholders to voice concerns that are present within the community that we face and provide helpful insight into the review process. On April 1 of this year, the minimum wage rate increased to \$15.60 per hour. Currently, this province has the highest minimum wage rate in Atlantic Canada.

WorkplaceNL is also under our purview in this area, so we're going to deal with that as well. So I want to talk a little bit about the review of workers' compensation division. The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Review Division reviews final decisions of WorkplaceNL for errors in the application of the policy, the legislation under the authority of the *Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Act*.

The final report of the statutory review of the workers' compensation system was released on June 18 of 2021. It contained 48 recommendations. To date, 30 of those 48 recommendations have been completed. Some of those would be issues for a public call for consultations to consider expanding the policy to include chronic stress in the workplace violence and harassment.

We were also working with Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Harvesting Safety Association to develop a Fishing Vessel Safety Designate Program. We've approved funding for two positions over three years with NL Health Services to promote safety and injury prevention within the health care, and I'm sure we'll talk a little bit about that throughout tonight's proceedings.

I could go on a little bit more, but I'll stop it there because I'm sure there's going to be some questions that my friends in Labour will have, and I first of all want to say thank you to the fantastic staff that we have in Environment and Climate Change and

Labour, as well as WorkplaceNL and the Review Division, Labour Relations Board and others for the great work they do. Many of the things that we have happening in the province of a positive nature goes without even coming to the minister's desk or to the House of Assembly or to the public, which is a testament to the hard work that they do in Labour in particular.

With that, Mr. Chair, I look forward to the questions from my colleagues across the way.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

I'll now turn to the Member for Exploits who is going to start the first round of questions.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

First of all, some general questions on 4.1.01 and 4.1.02.

In 4.1.01, could you provide us with the amount of conciliation, preventative mediation and arbitration process that were undertaken and the results of these processes?

B. DAVIS: Yes, so we can provide you with all the statistics –

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

B. DAVIS: Sorry about that. I got a jump a little early. I'll get used to the timing, Mr. Chair.

We have the data that you're looking for. We can easily provide that, and I'll just read it into the record now. Conciliation request that we had as of March 31, 2024, were 63. Conciliation settlements were 41. Appointments of arbitrator requests was 23. Preventative mediation requests were 64. First collective agreement mediations, there were five of those. The number of strikes were two. as I highlighted earlier.

We'll make sure we leave that with you for your records after.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

How many employees are currently in the division?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Just one second.

In Labour Relations, there are five permanent if you count – do you want me to go through all of the Labour Relations side for the whole division? Because that would include the Fish Price-Setting Panel, which would be one; Labour Standards which would be 11; Labour Relations Board, which would be seven; and Workers' Compensation Independent Review Board, which would be 18.

I can give you a list of all the staff that we have in all the departments, all the divisions. You'll have that at the end of the day, or the end of the evening.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay, perfect. We can go that way.

Under 4.1.02, what is the remuneration for the members of the panel?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: The Fish Price-Setting Panel?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

B. DAVIS: Okay, just give me one second.

That's in the next section, but we'll deal with it here for you if you'd like.

The remuneration for the Fish Price-Setting Panel, which I'll give you a copy of this as

well, the chairperson is \$5,000 retainer; the alternate chairpersons are \$2,000 a day, paid by the government; and regular members are \$3,000 retainer and \$1,200 dollars per day paid by the association, as well as the union, and the alternate members are the same, paid \$1,200 a day.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Is the minister satisfied with this composition of the panel?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes.

P. FORSEY: How many times has the panel met in the past year?

CHAIR: Minister.

B. DAVIS: It's an interesting question because it is a little bit up and down each year. So I can't tell you when they're going to meet this year, but I can tell you that Yvonne Scott, assistant deputy minister, can give you the details of exactly how many. I think it was 13 species negotiated, or possible to negotiate and, I think, there was 10 that – I'll let you do that, sorry.

CHAIR: The ADM, Yvonne Scott.

Y. SCOTT: There are 13 species that are negotiated each year, with the potential of 15 hearings, because shrimp is negotiated three times each year. So, last year, we had a very successful year in terms of concluding agreements. We had four that went to the panel and 10 that were negotiated.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: All right, thank you.

4.1.01, Labour Relations, Salaries: Budget '24 is revised – a decrease of \$58,700 indicating potential reductions in staffing costs or compensation adjustments.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: That's lower due to delay in recruitment for vacant positions there. You're going to see if there's generally a revised number that's less than we budgeted for, it's probably going to be that way throughout the entire Estimates, just so you know. I'll clarify if it's any different than that, but continue to ask that question.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Again, an increase of basically \$65,000 suggested in the rebound salary allocations possibly to restore or enhance the staffing levels for the Labour Relations services.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, that's a very good question as well. The increase reflects the forecasted salary increases that would be coming and also the recruitment of those vacant positions that were there.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: With the observed reduction in the Labour Relations budget for Operational Accounts, followed by the return of initial levels, how does the government justify these fluctuations and ensure that the budgetary changes will not undermine the effectiveness of central Labour Relations services, particularly conciliation, mediation and arbitration which are crucial for maintaining a stable and fair labour environment?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: We're always looking at the best practices. We've got a review that's taking place, always looking at different departments and different sections in divisions that we have, to always improve those things.

We think we have a good complement of staff that are there. It hasn't impacted, in any way, the services that we're providing for those very important services that you talked about with mediation and conciliation services. Those are paramount to the success of industry and just the general flow of the economy in this province, so we want to make sure that we have those services kept in place and we're going to continue to keep an adequate staff level there to maintain that.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

4.1.01, Operating Accounts: A decrease of \$20,400 suggests a scaling back of operation expenditures.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: No, our deputy minister.

CHAIR: Oh, the deputy minister.

V. SNOW: Thank you.

You are right, there is a decrease in the Operating Accounts. The main decrease that you'll see there is a result of decreased travel costs this year due to a reduction in the number of hearings that were needed. That is demand driven, as you mentioned, so it rebounds again to the 2024 Estimate to ensure that there's enough money there to cover any requests for conciliation hearings, but the reason you see the \$20,000 reduction is due to that.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: 4.1.02.

B. DAVIS: Okay, just give me one second.

P. FORSEY: The same thing, Salaries, we're showing a budget revised there: no change indicating stable salary funding for the panel – *Budget 2024* is revised.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, so the increase that you see there for the Estimates for '24-'25 would be just the forecast salary increase that would normally be. There is consistency there with the Fish Price Setting Panel, which is a good thing. I think it needs to stay consistent to ensure that we provide that service, when required, as a last resort for the two parties to come to a collective agreement.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

How does the government plan to ensure the panel's capacity to mediate effectively between harvesters and processors and not be compromised?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: What was the last part, sorry?

P. FORSEY: How does the government plan to ensure the panel's capacity to mediate effectively between harvesters and processors and not be compromised?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: A very good question.

We're under constant review. Ever since I've been the minister there, we're always reviewing the Fish Price Setting Panel with both of the key stakeholders, ASP, as well as FFAW. We did that the first year I was minister, made some tweaks to make the panel a little bit more effective for what their needs were. Based on the requests that they wanted to see in the panel, we made those changes.

We further made changes the following season, after the season, we sat down with parties, they wanted it to be more reflective of what they wanted to advocate for, for each of their particular sides, and provided

more of an arbitrated approach than just a final offer selection approach.

So we made those changes that were required based on what both parties wanted over an extensive review of team's recommendations that came out of a report that we had done in the off-season.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Do you have a number of estimated meetings since last spring to this one?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I would think that from August, when we started the process of trying to determine how we were going to best move forward with a formula-based approach for the paddle, I would say there was in excess – I'd just be guessing, but there was in excess of a dozen or more meetings with myself and staff and a senior mediator or conciliation officer. I wouldn't be off by saying 60 or 70 meetings that they've had with both parties over the time frame from when we decided we were going to try to move on back, to get parties back at the negotiating table for multiple, multiple meetings a week and daily phone calls about trying to move parties to where they needed to be to get a negotiated deal, but also to talk about the very process that you're just asking about now.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay. Thank you.

I think that's it for the 4.1.02. Are we into 4.1.03?

CHAIR: Yes.

P. FORSEY: Yeah.

4.1.03 in Salaries there we're showing a variance, a decrease of \$52,200. What's the reason for this reduction?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

Lower due to delay in recruitment for vacant positions. As I said, that would be a consistent thing, generally. If we budget something and the revised is different, that would be why.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: All right, thank you.

Operating Accounts: We see a decrease there of \$1,700 suggesting minor cutbacks in professional operations and expenditures. Is that correct?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah. So what you would have seen is the reductions that you would have seen above that would make up for that. I mean, we're going to see slight changes and variations over the budget from time to time in those things.

I don't know if the deputy minister would like to add in anything to that.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Snow.

V. SNOW: Thank you.

Similar to the case of 4.1.02, there was reduced travel in the budget this year based on what was forecasted versus what was actually incurred. So the operating budget goes back to the levels forecasted for this year, taking into consideration that travel may be necessary at this similar level as forecasted for last year.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay, thank you.

Considering the decrease in the Labour Standards budget for 2024, followed by an increase in the '24-'25 Estimates, what specific initiatives or enhancements are planned to ensure effective enforcement of the *Labour Standards Act* and how will these changes directly benefit workers and employers?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, I think the premise of the question is accurate that there is a reduction in what was budgeted, for what was actually revised at the end of the year, that's based on recruitment, but there will be no degradation of responsibility or impact on the ability for the staff to do the work that's required. That was a position that was vacant that we were filling and there's a gap in the filling of that position. That's all that was and that's the difference. The line share of the difference that we're voting on here year over year will be that.

You see that in the '24-'25 Estimates that the number is back up actually higher than it was in the previous year for the budget. That's taking into account the regular salary forecasted increases that would be there, among other things.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: No, we're done with that.

CHAIR: No further questions? Thank you.

I'll next turn to the Member for Bonavista. Do you have any questions?

C. PARDY: No.

CHAIR: Moving on to the Third Party, do you have any questions?

B. DAVIS: I think there's another section there, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: I'm just recycling through on this section.

So I'll turn to the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the minimum wage, what are the plans or is there a plan to actually move the minimum wage to a minimum living wage and then to index it to the cost of living?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

As I stated in my remarks earlier, every two years we have to do a legislative review of the minimum wage. We're in that process now. We've already done the public consultations on that. We're going to be dealing with some stakeholder consultations now that will come forward with a report on how we move forward, if an additional increase is required.

There are also other departments in government that are doing work. I sit on a Committee with you on the basic income discussion that we're working on. So it's not one size fits all here from this perspective with minimum wage. It's going to be across government, at least a couple of different departments, that will be dealing with some of that work that you're talking about.

There is a current review that's under way right now and I'll wait for the report to come back from the staff that's doing that.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

But is there an intent to move it towards a livable minimum wage?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Based on what came out of the previous public Minimum Wage Review Committee work that was done two years

ago, it was based on getting it to a \$15-an-hour wage, which we got there a little earlier than they had asked us to get there. Then they wanted it tied to a measure that all players in this, both sides, employers and employees, could budget for that.

So it's tied currently right now to national CPI, which is what the current increase of 60 cents was on April 1, which is a fairly substantive increase at the one time. I don't think we've had a 60-cent increase ever, at least in my recent memory. Over the last decade or more, we haven't had anything of a 60-cent increase at one particular moment in time.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

My colleague from Labrador West sent you a letter today regarding the licensing of Uber and the ride-hailing and food delivery app companies, and I'm just curious here whether Uber likes to classify their drivers as independent contractors when, really, they're employees. I'm wondering how you, as the Minister of Labour, see the people who work for Uber. Are they indeed independent contractors or would they be employees and entitled to the benefits and protections as employees, the right to unionize, minimum wage and so on and so forth?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, it's a very good question. It's something that we've talked about at the federal FTP table as recently as a week and a half ago. It's something that all jurisdictions are looking at. I don't think anyone has moved significantly on it. There are a couple of jurisdictions that are very early in that stage now.

We're going to look to our counterparts across the country and see from best practice. We're going to continue to look at it and I will say that every person that's

working should be treated as good as possible by their employer, whether it be a contractor coming into a workplace or not.

But from our standpoint of that, we're looking at it from the FTP table now. We're working closely with our colleagues across the country, but I haven't got an update for you today. But it's something that we're looking at.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I would hope that we'd have something on this before the end of the year and before the Uber becomes established and practices become established.

I'm just wondering if you met with labour unions and consulted with the local app-based workers as a fundamental part of any attempt to bring in solutions to legislation.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I missed the middle part there. I don't have my earpiece here, so –

J. DINN: Chair, with your permission, I just asked: Have you met with labour unions and local app-based workers as a fundamental part of the review and as to what protections need to be brought in?

B. DAVIS: Yeah, we've met with labour stakeholders. We have a quarterly meeting that we meet with the Federation of Labour. We're open for meetings with all labour unions and stakeholders that would be affected by the labour in general terms. We've met with the Federation of Labour in particular, I don't know, maybe eight or 10 times now over the last couple of years.

But they have a standing meeting with me every three months anyway, regardless of if there's nothing on the agenda. But anytime there's something on the agenda, they can surely call our office and we'll definitely get

together. But as far as it goes with making any changes, obviously we'll be consulting with our stakeholders.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Have you consulted with the local, app-based workers for Uber Eats and so on and so forth?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I can't hear that last part you're saying.

J. DINN: Sorry, I'm away from the mic.

I'm just wondering if you've actually consulted with or spoken to employees or workers who are basically local, app-based delivery drivers for food services and so on and so forth?

B. DAVIS: Oh, yes. I was missing that last little part that you were saying.

No, I have not met with them specifically. That's something that we can do and we're willing to do. We haven't as of yet, and we haven't had anyone reach out to us from that perspective to meet on that. I know the Federation of Labour has, on at least the last two occasions we've met, talked about gig workers and workers in that area to consult on their behalf and with me. But, I mean, I'm open to meeting with anyone that has any interest in trying to move the direction of the labour movement or labour file forward.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: It's a two-part question. Has Teamsters 855 reached an agreement with Fewer's and what happens to that deal once private ambulance operators are integrated into a provincially run system?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, I think it's best for me to send that over to Assistant Deputy Minister Scott. She'll give you the most up-to-date information on that. But my understanding is it is with the Labour Relations Board.

Y. SCOTT: Are you inquiring about their first certification collective agreement?

J. DINN: Yes, anything on it.

Y. SCOTT: Yeah, okay.

So following the introduction of the *Essential Ambulance Services Act*, those bargaining units had to establish an essential services agreement. They weren't successful in doing that. They went to the Labour Relations Board. The board ordered it to binding arbitration.

The terms and conditions that were outstanding were imposed and the parties didn't have to resume any strike action. Their collective agreement expires, I think it's March 31, 2025. So it was for a two-year agreement that was imposed.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: What happens then with this deal once it's integrated into a provincially run system? Will that be –?

CHAIR: ADM Scott.

Y. SCOTT: We would not be involved in that.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Have there been any new unions or bargaining units certified in the previous year? I don't know if you've mentioned that, Minister, or not?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I think we've mentioned that there was five. I'm just going from memory there now. I'll look at the numbers, but I think it was five. We'll get that information for you.

Five first collective agreements – no, I don't think I got that at my fingertips.

CHAIR: ADM Scott.

Y. SCOTT: There were seven new certifications – sorry, pardon me. I'm just looking at the wrong date here. There were 31 new certifications in 2023-24.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Minister, you mentioned that there are two strikes. I'm just wondering if there were any lockouts in the previous year or would you count (inaudible)?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: No.

J. DINN: Okay.

Has any change been considered to the union certification process and what arguments have been raised against reinstating card certification?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, there's been no movement on changing that at this point. There have been meetings on both sides of the issue with respect to that, but there has been no decision made to go in any direction other than where we're to right now.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Will the department consider tabling anti-replacement worker legislation in the

House, especially now that Ottawa has passed its own?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

I have answered this question a couple of times in petitions to your hon. colleague, the MHA for Labrador West. As the Labour Minister, we've got to balance both the rights and needs of the worker as well as the rights and needs of the employer, and that's a very divisive issue. We're still working through it.

But as I've said to the stakeholders when they come to meet with me, it's an issue that I'd like to keep on the agenda from their perspective because it's always nice to have a conversation, get an update on their take on it every time they come in to meet with me.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

You're just about out of time.

J. DINN: Yeah. I only have a few more questions, but I'll –

CHAIR: Are you done, Mr. Forsey?

P. FORSEY: (Inaudible) 5.1.01.

CHAIR: Okay, then with the Committee's support, I'll just go back to the Member for St. John's Centre to finish up his questions.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

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

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Another good question. As we've had numerous meetings with the Federation of Labour, we moved on some of the things that we've talked about or they've talked about with us, and some things are more of a longer standing issue.

We are always looking at ways we can improve labour standards and labour relations in this province. So we'll continue to work with our stakeholders every meeting when they bring forward issues, things we can move on quickly that we can do. Things that are more divisive, we'll have to take some more time and consult on both sides of the spectrum.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Minister, has the department received any feedback on the *Fishing Industry Collective Bargaining Act* since the legislation was amended in the fall of '22, especially, I guess, in light of recent events? Is there any interest or intention to review?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Like I said in my opening remarks, the Fish Price Setting Panel and FICBA in general terms, we've made some amendments over the last two years and we'll be open to discussing with both parties at their leisure – it doesn't have to be at the end of the season, it can be at any point – to look at the best piece of legislation that could help the industry that is vital to this province.

The fishing industry is vital to this province and the people that we all represent. We're going to continue to try to get the – whether it be the Fish Price Setting Panel or FICBA in general terms, whatever, both stakeholders and stakeholders across the province, think would be beneficial. We'll be willing to hear it out and see what we can do to make it better.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Has any further consideration been given to bringing in paid sick leave for all employees in this province? If so, what hurdles are you seeing in going from design to implementation of such a decision?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, thank you.

That's another big topic at the FTP table, or federal-provincial-territorial meetings that we had a week and a half ago or so. Obviously, it's something that I think all jurisdictions would like to look at. There is a significant cost associated with it.

I know some jurisdictions have moved on some portions of paid sick leave. I know that we have seven protected sick days. I feel for employees as well as employers, and one of the ideas that I've asked Minister O'Regan to look at would be looking at the EI fund as a possibility to have employers, as well as employees, contribute to receive those benefits. There could be a way of doing it that it could be a bill-back sort of thing from the employer, to allow at least a portion of that to be able to be covered and earned by the employee and to soften that blow to the small businesses around our province.

A lot of businesses do exactly what you just highlighted, Mr. Dinn, but some businesses that are smaller in nature can't afford to. There are some out there, of course, because they're not necessarily the great employers that we'd like them to all be. That's why we have the Labour Standards Division to at least ensure there's a minimum standard. But I know there is a significant amount of employers that do exactly what you indicated. There are some that are not doing it because of cost and there are some that would never do it unless they were dragged to doing it.

So I think there's an opportunity out there for us to work and find a solution there and that's what I've asked our federal government to help us. I know my FTP colleagues around the table like the suggestion and are hopeful that the federal government will give us an update in short – I won't say short order, because that gives it a bit more time. I don't know how long the federal government will take to do it, but I pressured them the last two times we met in person so I'm hopeful that that will be the case.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

A question now regarding pensions and health benefits. So a lot of not for profits who do the work of government, and I would say a lot of small businesses and organizations, there is no pension plan as such unless you count maybe in some cases a Government Money Purchase plan, or independent businesses or organizations have to find their own plan, which can be a bit more expensive than let's say the government plans, or employees must, you know, go through Blue Cross and so on and so forth.

So my question is this: Has there been any discussion or interest in exploring the idea of extending the Public Service Pension Plan, opening up to the organizations and the businesses and the employees that I've just spoken about?

Now I only suggest this because the plans are now in a healthy state and if you look at the model of employee-employer contributions, as long as it pays for itself, it's a way that, I guess, a small business, organizations can probably have affordable benefits for their employees.

So I'm just curious, I have spoken to labour groups about this as to where they stand.

So I don't know if you've had discussions with them or discussions within your department.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, very interesting topic, very interesting discussion. I know that some of my federal counterparts are looking at that very question. I know that's probably a question better served for Treasury Board, but it's something that we'll take under advisement based on what you've said and discuss it.

It's not something that the labour unions have raised directly with me in any of our meetings, but it is a novel idea and if it's cost-neutral, it's something that we should be considering. Any opportunity that we can have to help employees on a longer term basis would be beneficial.

I know that's the 10,000-view level but it's not something that's lost on us for sure.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

No and that's the key thing you bring it, if it's cost-neutral and it actually, I guess, attracts employees to small businesses and it's more affordable, then it's an option to explore.

One last question, Chair.

Is there any review of the *Labour Standards Act* planned for the coming year?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Nothing directly that's planned for this coming year. Although, as I've said many times, we've listened to our stakeholders and we may not have actioned everything but we do listen. At the end of the day, if it makes sense for the key stakeholders that we have, it's something

we'll pursue and consider and look at how options can be – the art of the possible, I guess, to make it better, if it needs to be.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

I'll go to the independent Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

You have a total of 10 minutes, so whatever you use here we'll take from the total at the end.

P. LANE: Thank you.

Minister, just wondering – my colleague asked a lot of the questions I had – can you comment on the time-and-a-half minimum wage for overtime? That's an issue I hear from people, especially like the lower paid employees, that under the current legislation you don't have to pay somebody time and a half, you just have to pay them time and a half the minimum wage. So if you were making say \$20 an hour, one might expect, okay, I'm going to get paid \$30 an hour when I work overtime, when indeed all they have to pay is time and a half, the \$15.60, whatever it is now.

This has been an ongoing thing. Are there any plans in changing that?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you for the question.

It's something that we get from time to time. As we've said, Labour Standards set the minimum standards for things. That doesn't mean that you have to pay that. Many, many employers wouldn't be able to get labour force to do the work if they were paying time and a half of minimum wage. Very few would pay that. There are some, of course.

That's something that don't get raised a lot with us, but it has been something that has

come up from time to time. It is something that we'll continue to look at, but it's not something that's on the horizon right now.

As I've said, we just set the minimum standards. There's many, many businesses that pay significantly more than the minimum standards.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: I understand. Obviously, I'm more concerned with the ones who don't.

B. DAVIS: Yes.

P. LANE: The other thing I just want to put out there – and, again, I know it's minimum standards, but I heard of, certainly a couple of years ago during the whole Loblaw's strike and all that kind of stuff, of employees, what I would call, being abused as far as I'm concerned with all these split shifts.

They come in and work for three hours. They go in there – oh, it's a slow day; go home early but you're only going to get paid for two hours. Then they come in and say go home and come back for a couple of more hours and so on. They're really abusing this whole split shift business. Come in early and if it's slow, go home. Come in late and if it's slow, go home. If it's busy, now I'm telling you to stay longer than you're prepared to stay and the fact that you might have plans made and kids to pick up, too bad, you're going to stay an extra two hours because we're busy.

That type of thing is happening, so I'm told, and I'm wondering are there any plans on looking at the legislation to prevent that kind of abuse of employees by bad employers – I know there are good ones.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I guess that's not a concern that's come to my attention over the last

couple of years in here and I know it's been a concern in the past. I think that the bigger concern that comes to my table when we meet with stakeholders is the lack of labour in general terms.

So the ability to treat employees, as you've described, is becoming harder and harder for employers to do because there is a lack of labour for the workforce that's required in many places, whether it be McDonald's, Tim Hortons or Loblaws. I mean, they're having struggles to get employees to work so they're doing as much as they possibly can to try to mitigate those impacts that you talked about.

It's not something that I'm saying doesn't happen. It's something that I haven't had raised to me by the Federation of Labour in any of our recent meetings in the last couple of years. I know it was prevalent in the past. It's something that I expected to hear more of. After this, tonight, I'm sure I'm going to hear 15 messages on it because I've said that tonight.

What I'm saying to you is, as I see it right now with respect to the last couple of years in this role, there has been very little movement towards asking me to look at that, because there hasn't been much call for it because of the labour shortage – I'm guessing because of the labour shortage that's around the province.

P. LANE: I appreciate that, Minister.

That'll be my last question for now and I do appreciate your answer. But I would say that, let's face it, a lot of the people that we're talking about that are working in these places and working these split shifts and so on, a lot of these people are not going to pick up the phone, I would suggest, and call your office or department necessarily. They'll probably feel like they are downtrodden and beat up or whatever and they'll just go home and they'll suck it up and take it and they'll go back tomorrow and

they'll take it again. Unfortunately, that's what happens in a lot of cases.

Anyway, I'll conclude there.

B. DAVIS: One more comment on that, not to prolong the discussion. But I do want to give credit to the Federation of Labour who meet on a regular basis. What you describe, the employees in those type of industries probably wouldn't, I agree. But I know full well how Federation of Labour advocates for those individuals.

I know that if they would be hearing it, they would be advocating quite heavily for it. So I'm not suggesting it's not happening, because I'm sure it does happen from time to time. It's just probably not as prevalent as it was, based on what you were talking about with Loblaws. I fully agree with you on that. I'm just saying it's not something that's come up in the last couple of years raised as a major issue or an issue for the Federation of Labour.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Any further questions from the Committee Members?

Seeing no further questions, shall subheadings 4.1.01 to 4.1.03 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: Now I'll ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: Labour Relations Board, 5.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01 carry?

I turn to the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: 5.1.01, I have a couple of general questions. How many people are currently employed and how many vacancies are here?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Right now at the Labour Relations Board, there are seven positions: six permanent, one contract position. Six of them are filled and one is vacant. We're working on that person, by the way.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: What is the average time that it takes to make a decision?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Just one second. I'm going to throw it over to ADM Scott, because I think she has that information at her fingertips.

Y. SCOTT: No, unfortunately, I do not. It's really hard to provide that information because each case that goes in front of the board is so distinct and the ability to get through it will depend upon a number of factors. We can give you the number of applications that have been made to the board and how many have been concluded, and those sorts of fact-based items, but we don't have the average time frame in which to complete a case from start to finish.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: And I think I'd like to just add to it that it really hinges upon the parties as well. I asked that same question as well and we try to make sure the timings are as fast as possible, but sometimes you're waiting on additional information from one or both of the parties, and that could be weeks or months in some cases to get that information. So it really skews the results.

If all the information is included, the decisions are fairly quick, even if they are complex. In many cases, all the information is not there from either party, or you've got to go looking for that information, and that takes time because you're dealing with lawyers, in most cases, and that's not the only case they're working on. It may be the only case our Labour Relations Board could be working on at that time, but that's not the only case that the other parties would be working on at the same time.

But we are cognizant of the fact that we want quick turnaround times; we're going to continue to do that, and we're actually doing a review of the organizational structure there now, just to see if there are any additional resources that will be required, or the way in which the positions are structured.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

Is there enough money to properly resource and staff the board to prevent the employee turnover and delays that we've historically seen?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

5.1.01, under Salaries, an increase of \$29,000 basically indicated in the expansion for staffing levels.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: The revision of '23-'24 budget, yes, there was an increase that was due to annual leave payout for a former employee.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

With the Labour Relations Board seeing a budget increase for 2024 but a subsequent decrease in '24-'25 Estimates, how does the government plan to sustain the board's enhancement capabilities, particularly in the mitigation and adjudication to ensure ongoing support for fair and efficient labour dispute relations?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: So as I've said to you, we're doing an organizational review, but the actual increase in budget '23-'24 is sort of a misnomer. It is an employee payout that is leaving the position, that moved on from the position so there was annual leave that was accrued that needed to be paid to the employee. That pushed the salary line up higher than it would regularly be.

You see Salaries have increased with the normal step increase anyway. So there is no reduction at the Labour Relations Board. If anything, we're working on the organizational review to streamline and make it more efficient but not looking at cutting anything; actually looking at what may need to be looked at in how the workflows are done.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Under Labour Relations Board: The increase of \$40,600 reflecting on overall enhancement in the budget allocated to the Labour Relations Board.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Where are you pointing to the ...?

P. FORSEY: That would be –

B. DAVIS: Okay, yeah, I think the deputy minister picked up on that.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Snow.

V. SNOW: Thank you.

Yes, so there is a \$40,000 difference and as the minister mentioned, some of that reflects the payout, as you'll see in Salaries, that was the annual leave. The rest of that, \$23,000, was due to higher legal fees that were required this year due to increased board activities.

So we're anticipating this year that the level of legal fees and board activity would remain as it has historically been. So that goes from \$72,000, up to \$95,000 this year and we're anticipating a similar level to the previous years, \$72,000, again.

Should we have the same amount of activity and legal requirements, we would seek savings from across the department to cover the costs.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits has no further questions.

Thank you.

I'll turn to the Member for St. John's Centre for 10 minutes.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to go back to the number of positions that are currently there and the number of vacancies. Not asking about that, but I think the minister said that there was one vacant, but I know in previous answers, the minister has also said that with regard to the Salaries – at least on two occasions – said that the variance in the budget line was due to a delay in recruitment.

I'm just curious as to why the delay. Is it just about not enough staff to get the advertisements out? I'm just looking at what is causing the delay and how it might be impacting the work of the department.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, so that's a good question. A review is going to look at that as well, but in general terms, I had the pleasure of doing Estimates this morning, which was Public Service Commission, and generally we don't know when someone is going to give notice to move to a new position or what not. They may give you a two-week, a month notice or whatnot. It takes time to put an advertisement out, recruit a person to get the application, give them a period of time to apply. Then when you select the successful candidate, that person has to give notice, generally of a period of time, to their current employer in order to come. So that's the lag time that you see in recruitment of positions.

In general terms, that's what we see. Some positions are very hard to recruit because they're very extensively experienced that you're going to see throughout the Estimates tonight. But some positions it's just a natural way of one person of a group of seven leave, well we don't know when that's going to happen. It happens and then we deal with it right away. The recruitment process takes a period of time to get a suitable candidate and then that suitable candidate has to give time.

So that's part of the reason why you see vacancies there. We do have one vacancy right now for the deputy CEO position. The reason why that's not recruited right now is because there's a review underway to see what best use of that position would be, whether that's the best use of it to be a deputy CEO or whether it's to be a senior officer, a board officer or whatnot.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

That's fair enough. I guess when I see the word delay, which means that the department or the minister has an understanding of what is a normal period of time, so when I hear the word delay, it

implies that it's deviating from what is a standard time.

Would it be possible then to have, I guess, the number of vacancies and the length of time they have been vacant? Is that possible?

CHAIR: The minister for a response.

B. DAVIS: I think we could look at that to see if we can get – if the information is available and we can find it, you can have it.

J. DINN: Okay.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely. I think we can find it. I just don't think it's readily available. I think we'd have to do some hunting to get it, but it's not something that I don't think we collect the data on the vacancy for how long it's been sitting there, but we could for each individual division. I'm sure someone may have some semblance of it there, but we can get it for you at the end of the Estimates, if you'd like.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: I'll probably come back to another question on that sometime, Minister. I'm just trying to find out as to why the delay or why there are vacancies. Is it because we are failing to recruit, not even that, or is it just that people don't want to go into a government-related job? It's one I've heard now since I've sat in this position.

My last question then has to do with the average time. I understand totally that it might be difficult to give an average time, but I'm just wondering if you can provide what's been the shortest case and the longest case. That much I'm sure has got to be there, as to which one – I'm not looking for an average, but at least if I have an idea of what is the range. So if it's, like, one day for one and two years for another, I'll have my answer.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, it's a very good question, and it's one that we've worked very closely with the Federation of Labour on with respect to the Labour Relations Board, as well as many other labour unions that had expressed some concerns with the Labour Relations Board. Even meeting with Jessica since, they've seen an improvement. I won't say significant improvement, because that's words they could use, not mine, but they have seen a marked improvement anyway, of that.

I'm sure we can get you that from the Labour Relations Board, we don't have it here right now.

J. DINN: That's fair enough.

B. DAVIS: But we can get that for you. Like I said to MHA Forsey, it really depends on the complexity of that.

A lot of the time lags in that is not necessarily on the Labour Relations Board, it's more along getting the information back that's required or getting the hearing date set that meets the – when I had the Chair of the board up and chatting with him, a lot of it has to do with getting the hearing dates that are good for both parties. That could be months trying to work out schedules to get that straightened out.

So we'll get that information for you and the longer I speak on it the harder it's going to be for me to get that information to you, I guess.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair, that's it.

CHAIR: That's it? No further questions?

Does the unaffiliated Member want to use some of his remaining time on this section or wait?

P. LANE: First of all, I want some clarification on what you mean by my remaining time.

CHAIR: So you have a total of 10 minutes on the total heading.

P. LANE: What do you mean, total heading?

CHAIR: So you've used up –

P. LANE: What do you mean total heading? Define total heading.

CHAIR: Yeah, so this whole evening, the whole session here this evening.

P. LANE: Ten minutes for the entire evening?

So may I ask where that rule came from because we never had that before.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

P. LANE: First I ever heard of it.

CHAIR: The guidance from the Clerk is that's what has been provided in other Estimates. If the Committee decides they want a change, then please instruct and (inaudible) go, but that is what has been happening.

P. LANE: Well, I would say, Mr. Chair, just for the record, there's only been two. I was here yesterday and there was no issue. I did go speak to the Speaker today because I heard some rumour about something about – I wasn't sure and I thought when you said my 10 minutes at the end of each section, that's why I never said anything at the time, but I spoke to the Speaker and he said there are no rules and indeed it is up to the leave of the Committee if I want to ask a question. If we have lots of time and I'm not interfering with them, their ability to ask questions –

CHAIR: I'm looking to the Committee then for some guidance.

P. LANE: I don't have any questions on this section anyway, but I might have 10 minutes worth of questions at the very end or something, if that's okay with my colleagues.

CHAIR: I've received assurances that this has been the way it's been done in the past.

P. LANE: Well, I can tell you I've been here nine years and it hasn't been.

CHAIR: Anyway, regardless, you're happy right now.

The Member for St. John's Centre is trying to get my attention. Go ahead, Sir.

J. DINN: I'm quite comfortable to let the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands speak after each section. I'm okay with that.

CHAIR: It's up to the Committee. Absolutely up to everyone that is here.

P. LANE: I don't have any questions for that section.

CHAIR: Okay.

Perhaps what we're looking at is 10 minutes for the section of Labour and 10 minutes on the section dealing with Environment and Climate Change; would that be comfortable for everyone?

P. FORSEY: We've always had 10 minutes total.

CHAIR: Total – yeah, that's my experience, too.

Okay, so it's been proposed to have a look at it when your 10 minutes runs out.

Regardless, I now as the Clerk to call that heading.

CLERK: Labour Relations Board, 5.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Against?

Carried.

On motion, subhead 5.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: Now I ask the Clerk to call the final heading in this section.

CLERK: Workers' Compensation Independent Review Board, 6.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 6.1.01 carry?

I turn to the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay, 6.1.01, some general questions. How many commissioners are there at this point?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Good question. We have five full-time commissioners right now, one of which is the chief review commissioner. They're all full-time now, so that's the change that's been over the last number of years: We've moved to full-time.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

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

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: So we can give you some details on this as well. But they've closed 266 cases. As of March 31, 246 new applications that have been submitted, 212 hearings that were held and 28 outstanding

decisions. That's probably the answer to your question that you asked earlier, but I'm just going to give you more information than you asked for just because it's there at my fingertips.

Eighty-one cases waiting to be scheduled and heard. That's along the same lines as the Labour Relations Board. Sometimes the hearings are waiting to be scheduled and heard because of the parties. They've got everything done up to that point, but then they've got to wait for the parties to come back with dates that are agreeable to them.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Are there plans to hire new commissioners and what are the timelines?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, so there are no plans to hire new. We've got a full complement there. We're progressing through the files much better than – the Member will probably remember that in 2015, 2016 and 2017, there were significant lag times on cases and there was a part-time nature for the review commissioners. We found that that was not working and we moved it to full-time and quasi part-time as well.

So we've decided, as a government, to move in that direction and it's paying off dividends in getting through cases faster.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many hearings are currently scheduled?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Chair, 212 that are held and, as I said, 81 cases waiting to be scheduled/heard.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many are being held each month?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: An average of about 18.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How long after the hearing date is written decision given?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I don't have that information, but I think my ADM does.

CHAIR: ADM Yvonne Scott.

Y. SCOTT: Decisions are rendered on average of 66 days after the hearing, but 84 per cent of the decisions are rendered under 60 days.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay, thank you.

Have all recommendations of the statutory review been implemented and can you provide us with a list of what has been implemented and what is not?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: The answer to the first question is no, not all have been implemented yet; 30 of 48 have been implemented. The other 18, I think, are in varying degrees of completion. Some are operational in nature, and I can give you a list of what has been completed and what's outstanding to date. We can have that over to you when we're finished here – well, not tonight, but some point in the future.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

6.1.01, Salaries: A revised estimate from 2024-25 and an increase of \$155,000. What's the increase there for?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, that will be for the new full-time review commissioner and the increased salary increases that would be forecast.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay, in the Operating Accounts, a decrease there of \$98,000?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: That would be lower review commissioner costs, some \$65,000 there. There would be a little less transportation travel due to delays in recruitment and turnover, and training as well. Then lower meeting costs in general terms.

So those would be the three factors that would've lowered the Operating Accounts down to the level where it's to. Now that we have the full-time review commissioner hired and up and running, we expect that to go back to the regular \$212,200.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Given the substantial decrease in the Operating Accounts of the Workers' Compensation Independent Review Board of 2024, what specific operational changes or enhancements justify this fluctuation? How well do they improve the board's effectiveness in reviewing and resolving workers' compensation claims?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: The hiring of that full-time review commissioner will improve the board. Obviously, the decrease is essentially directly reflective of the reduction in one board officer being down for a period of

time. Now that board officer is hired, we expect it to go back to historical levels and, obviously, we see significant improvements in the backlog that used to be there.

So we're seeing some positive steps in the right direction. We're always going to be looking at the Workers' Compensation Independent Review Board to see if there are improvements that need to be made.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Under the Total: Department, revised 2024 versus the 2024-25 Estimate, an increase of \$5 million?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Where are you, sorry?

P. FORSEY: Total: Department.

B. DAVIS: The Total: Department?

Oh, sorry.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, Total: Department there.

B. DAVIS: Just one second.

Deputy Minister Snow.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Snow.

V. SNOW: So this is the overall budget for the department. There was a budget forecast of \$52 million, revised \$37 million, and then for Estimates next year we're looking at \$42 million.

So it's difficult – perhaps going line by line through the sections is the easiest way to show you where the increases and decreases are coming, rather than addressing it under this particular line item. That would be my suggestion, Minister.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Just to be clear, this is the total for the entire department, not for the Review Division, so the changes that you see there, I can speak to why it would be a significant reduction. That's going to be picked up in Climate Change. You're going to see that for the Challenge Fund as well as others.

I can see how that would be asked that way because of where it's to. It's the last one in the book and we started with the first.

CHAIR: Any further questions from Exploits?

P. FORSEY: We're good.

CHAIR: No.

Any further questions from St. John's Centre?

You have 10 minutes.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the recommendations from the statutory Committee of workers' compensation, with regard to an update on the recommendations for expanded worker representation at WorkplaceNL, what are the plans for that?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, so just quickly, we've invested in the worker representatives, based on the statutory review. I think it's two additional – I could be incorrect on that, but Assistant Deputy Minister Scott is shaking her head in disbelief that I'm promoting her like that, but she's saying that I'm correct in saying that it's two worker representatives that were there, and that is a very valid recommendation that we moved on very, very quickly.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: So just to be clear, that's two additional, or there are two workers there to begin with?

B. DAVIS: Two additional.

J. DINN: So the total number is ...?

B. DAVIS: That's a very good question. Four, I think, so we doubled the complement there.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Why will government still not commit to raising income replacement rates from 85 to 90 per cent?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Very good question. It is a recommendation from the statutory review. At the time of the statutory review, the funded position for WorkplaceNL was in the 130 per cent range, maybe 130, 131. It is significantly lower than that at this point. It fluctuates with the market. Not to say we're not doing that; we're still evaluating that.

It's something that we don't want to be in a situation where we move very quickly on something like that, where we have to claw back a benefit based on the fund being underfunded like it was in the not-too-distant past. We've got it to a funding ratio that is good. It's not as high as other jurisdictions across the country yet. I'm hopeful that some time we can move on that when the funding ratio is at a point, and stability that we have, that we don't think we'll ever have to pull it back.

That's essentially where we're to on that one. The IRR is a very costly venture but it's a very important one for employees and we're trying to find some way to look at the best thing as we go forward.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

If pension plans were funded at 130 per cent, we'd give our right arm. But I'm just curious then, when the minister says that the plan is significantly less than that now, do we have a number as to what exactly that funded ratio is?

B. DAVIS: I don't –

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Sorry, Mr. Chair, for jumping the gun.

I don't have that at my fingertips, maybe ADM Scott has it, but it was less than that the last meeting I had with WorkplaceNL.

CHAIR: ADM Scott.

Y. SCOTT: So as of probably a week and a half ago, the estimated funded position was 121 per cent.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Is there a fear that this is a downward trend and that it would go further? Knowing my experience with actuaries and the like, they can pretty well predict things for a while out, including when you plan to die. I'm just thinking then where is the concern? Is it that we'll be underfunded or that –

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: The target is 110, that we'd like to keep the fund at 110 or better, that's where it should be to handle the fluctuations within the market, but the market is very volatile as we've seen in our own portfolios or even RSP funds, it's very volatile over the last number of years. That volatility is hoping to be smooth over through different

types of investment styles, but that's where we're to at this point.

It's something that we're still considering. It's not off the table. We haven't made the decision on that yet. We're still waiting for a little bit more stability in the marketplace for that.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Is it expected or anticipated that they will go below 110 or below 100 and become underfunded?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I don't think it's anticipated to go under 100 per cent but we've seen almost an 11 per cent or 12 per cent reduction in just the last number of months, the last six or seven months while we've been talking about this. So it can be volatile. I know that last year's statement was 131 or so, 132, and now this year we're down to 121-ish. So I think that it is the volatility in the market that's making it hesitant for all parties involved with this. It is a challenging thing.

The last thing we want to do is give a benefit that would put the fund under extra stress, that would make it more challenging for employers to fund that, as well as employees to have to be clawed back at some point in the future, like we've had to do in the past, I'm going to say in the '80s and early '90s, I think there was a claw back in that we were severely underfunded.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

So is the 110 per cent the baseline to maintain benefits as they currently exist or is that the trigger mark to make changes? I know in our own pension plan, once it hits a certain level of over funding, it triggers whether we increase benefits or we decrease premiums, and it's not 100 per

cent, it's usually above that. I'm just trying to get an idea of what that 110 per cent represents and if 110 per cent is the trigger to it: well, we've got to decide what we're going to do. It would've been an opportunity to increase benefits at that time as well.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes.

So very good question. My understanding is 110 per cent is where you start to get a little bit more nervous about the situation of the fund. What we've been able to do over the last number of years – it takes a number of years for the changes that have currently been made into the system to work through the system to see the kind of impact. This is actuarial that have been telling WorkplaceNL this, that are passing that on to us, that it takes a number of years to see what impacts would've been on presumptive cancer coverage, PTSD coverage, those things that we've done in the last number of years to see that transfer through the system.

Once we start to see that coming through – we're starting to see the spike in some of the increased benefits we've given and employees have earned that have decreased the fund. Everything we do to increase benefits, decreases the fund and either the employers have to pay for it or it's reduced in benefits over, if the fund gets underfunded.

We're not in that situation yet, so I don't want anyone to be nervous about that. But we're still looking at it with cautious optimism that it will get back up to a number that will be very beneficial to be doing on both sides of the equation, looking at employer rebates, as well as employee improvements to their benefits.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the backlog of cases to process at WorkplaceNL, and I think you mentioned, Minister, 212 hearings are scheduled, 81 cases are waiting to be scheduled and heard. I know it's going to be difficult to address the issue of backlog, but would these be a backlog or is this normal? I guess I'm trying to decide is there a backlog based on that or is this just the standard operating?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I think, being in the Estimates, in my first iteration of Labour a number of years ago, that number for cases waiting to be heard was significantly higher. So it has come down. I've got a very strong comfort level that we've hit the sweet spot of where we need to be with the full-time commissioners that the cases – we can't control every delay.

Regardless, if we had 10 people working or not, there still could be delays because if we schedule a case, it could be someone from a different part of the province that can't travel or can't travel at a particular time, or not able to travel or we may need to go to them, or virtually.

I know that all of those things are things we weigh, but the number of decisions rendered in this fiscal year was 214, which is the highest we've had in seven years. It is up 27 per cent compared to last year, which was 169.

So we are seeing an improvement of cases being heard. That's quite significant if you look at that benefit alone and you add the full-time review commissioner there now, for this year, that number could only go up which will be beneficial to us. I'm quite happy to see the progress made in there and the changes to move to a full-time review commissioner model is actually a very good decision. I'm very pleasantly surprised that it's moved in that direction as fast as it has.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, thank you. It was just the context of the number that I'd be interested in.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely.

J. DINN: Is it possible to get a breakdown of the number of people receiving workers' compensation by industry?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: We can do that, and the ADM is shaking her head so I think she may even have it for you right there.

CHAIR: ADM Scott.

Y. SCOTT: We do have that and we can get you a copy.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

Any further questions from Exploits?

P. FORSEY: Not on that heading, no.

CHAIR: Does the Member for St. John's Centre have any more?

J. DINN: I do.

CHAIR: Okay, we'll give you another 10 minutes, Sir.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: I'm very generous.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, can we expect any further changes this coming year as to how medical reporting is done on disease claims?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I know that Workplace is always looking at ways to improve the system. The short answer will be we're always looking at ways to improve. The long answer is I'm sure that there will be changes over the coming number of years in that because we've made changes over the last number of years to improve the benefits, the ability for people to receive benefits and open that up over the last number of years.

So I'm sure that there will be more. I can't speak to any specifics of that, at this point, for this year but I know that there will be improvements because there has been in the last number of years as well, and there will continue to be.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Last question, Chair.

When can we expect to see movement on creating an occupational health clinic, which was recommended by the Health Accord?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Great news – actually, in the budget, I think there's at least some movement on positions within the health authority. WorkplaceNL have met with unions in the health field to look at what best practices to move forward on that.

That's something that will be coming in the near future, I would think, improvements with respect to that. I don't foresee any issues with that embedding employees within the NL Health Services because there is a significant amount of injury that happens in the health care sector and I think that will be a benefit and discuss the marked improvements.

I think overall – and MHA Dinn, you're probably going to love this part – it's probably going to more than pay for itself,

which is good. So we can expand that and that is our hope with that. I hope that the workers will reduce injuries and, in turn, reduce lost time and, in turn, reduces costs to government as well as private sector.

We've seen some improvements in those areas when we've done it in the past and we're going to continue to double down on that. We're looking forward to it, quite honestly.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

J. DINN: No.

CHAIR: No?

Seeing no further questions – the unaffiliated member, nothing for you, Sir?

P. LANE: Pass.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

So I'll ask the Clerk then to call the section.

CLERK: Workers' Compensation Independent Review Board, 6.1.01.

CHAIR: 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.

B. DAVIS: Can you vote for yourself, Mr. Chair?

CHAIR: Who?

B. DAVIS: Can you vote for yourself, Mr. Chair?

CHAIR: No, I'm here only to resolve disputes and ties.

B. DAVIS: No, I was asking if I could.

CHAIR: We have concluded this section and we're going to do a little switch of seats if everybody wants to stand up for five or 10 minutes.

Okay, let's come back in 10 minutes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Good call.

CHAIR: We heard a good call, so it's the right thing.

Recess

CHAIR: We're going to go now and focus on the subheadings underneath Environment and Climate Change.

I would turn to the Clerk, first of all, to introduce what will be the focus of our remaining session here.

CLERK: Department of Environment and Climate Change, Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.01.

CHAIR: Thank you, Clerk.

I would now ask the minister for some opening remarks.

B. DAVIS: Back again, it's almost like Groundhog Day here. I'm just going to say I'll take a few minutes just to go through some of the topics. I'm not going to tell you the number of pages, but it was in the 20s, I'm not going to go through those because I think we've got a good thing here and I don't want to throw us off.

I do want to say that I'm happy that my fantastic staff is here, because without them we couldn't do half of what we do in the department, if not all of what we do in the department. As we've already done the Labour Relations Board, the Labour side of

the department, I'll just take a couple of moments to talk about some of the other sections in the department.

The Environment branch focuses on supporting environmental sustainability by protecting and managing water resources, pollution prevention and coordinating environmental assessments. The Climate Change branch focuses on developing strategy, policy, research, analysis and initiatives related to climate change and adaptation and mitigation as well as protection of natural areas. They provide programming to support, as I've said before, our Labour Relations Division. I'm not going to go into much detail, but they provide significant support to our businesses and employees that are out there in a unionized environment.

I could go on about the Climate Change Action Plan, but I think we're going to delve into a lot of that through our discussions. We've taken action on all 45 items that were recommended in the 2019 to 2024 Climate Change Action Plan that was led in part by – the Chair, I would think, had a role in that and stimulating clean innovation, growth and building resilience to climate change impacts; all of the efforts, including reduction emission targets for large industry; we have the lowest greenhouse gas emissions; we've lowered greenhouse gas emissions to 8.3-million tons in 2021, the second lowest since 1990 and the lowest since 1994 and well below the 10 million averaged over the past decade.

I'm happy to say that we're developing two new Climate Change Action Plans to cover the period of 2025 to 2030. One is a mitigation action plan that focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 2030 targets as well as laying the foundational actions to net zero by 2050.

The second is an adaptation plan that focuses on adapting to the change climate. This is the first standalone adaptation plan in the province's history. We're quite happy

that public consultation and engagement on both of these plans have been out there and are finished. We're now looking at the stakeholder engagement and hopefully working on those plans for the fall release that would hopefully be beneficial to all involved.

Budget 2024 includes some \$81.9 million in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in homes and buildings, plus \$2 million to continue support for electric vehicles, while addressing energy affordability. Funding includes transitioning homes from oil heat to electric heat. We've got significant investments over the past number of years through the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund, as well as the first fund and the second fund which we're dealing with right now. In June 2023, we announced a further \$157 million, which has amended to \$183 million.

I'm going through at a rapid pace because I see that my colleague is back in her chair so I won't go on any further than that, other than to say I look forward to answering your questions, delving into the inner workings of the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

If I can't answer your questions, I know full well that I have the greatest support team in all of government to come to my aid and save me from your onslaught of questions that I expect from the good Member for the District of Exploits.

CHAIR: Before we go there, I will just, for the record, like to introduce – and I ask Broadcast to please pick a light for the Member for Torngat Mountains, she's sitting in the Leader of the Third Party's chair and she can introduce herself.

Could you just introduce yourself. You're substituting for the Member for Labrador West.

L. EVANS: Okay, yes.

Thank you.

Lela Evans, MHA for Torngat Mountains.
I'm also the critic for Environment.

CHAIR: That's fine, thank you.

Just needed to have an introduction for the record.

I'll now turn to the Member for Exploits, you have 15 minutes, I believe. I'm sorry, I've been corrected, 10 minutes. We're into it now.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

Minister, it's a good thing you've got a good staff behind you.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely.

P. FORSEY: Anyway, we'll go with some –

B. DAVIS: I would say the same for you, on each side of you.

P. FORSEY: We'll just go with some general questions to start off with.

Can we have a copy of the minister's briefing binder?

B. DAVIS: Absolutely.

CHAIR: The minister said yes.

P. FORSEY: Are you still applying zero-based budgeting?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Are there errors in the published Estimate book?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I'm going to look to my staff; I do not think there are any errors –

P. FORSEY: Okay.

B. DAVIS: – nor omissions.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Have any positions been eliminated, and what are they?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: There have been no attrition. I'll answer some of your questions in advance, I think, because these are typical questions that tend to come at us. There has been no money from the financial assistance side. There's been no money from the contingency fund.

So I just answered those two questions because I think you're coming with them.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many people are employed in the department?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Very good question.

CHAIR: And just kind of give me a little pace here. Just put your hand up, I'll identify you and then we'll be good.

B. DAVIS: Yep.

CHAIR: Thank you.

CHAIR: The minister, please.

B. DAVIS: The admonishment by the Chair.

CHAIR: There'll be more.

B. DAVIS: I knew there would be more.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So we have 188 staff complement: 111 of those are permanent, 57 are temporary, 13 are contracts, seven are seasonal and there are 35 of those that are vacant, currently.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many retirements?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Three.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many layoffs have occurred in the last year?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I don't think there have been any layoffs, no.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many new hires?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Fourteen new hires.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

How many contractual and short-term employees are there?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thirteen contracts and 57 temporary.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: How many are working from home versus government offices?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: There are none that are working from home on a permanent basis, but that's the good thing about what COVID has had. It has had the ability for staff to work from home, when required, for a good reason, I guess, for that perspective.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: All right.

Did you receive any funds from the contingency fund? If so, how much and what was it for?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I did not receive any funds from contingency this year. I probably never asked either.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: All right.

1.1.01 –

B. DAVIS: Let me get there now, just one second.

P. FORSEY: Pardon?

B. DAVIS: Let me get there.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Salaries, an increase of \$38,000 suggested in the adjustments for the staff and expansions.

B. DAVIS: Yes, higher due to minister liaison positions that were put in place.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Operating Accounts, an increase of \$15,000 suggested in the rise in operational expenditures.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you –

CHAIR: Just to be clear, if I could. We need to pause because, as this is recorded as a transcript, we need to be able to identify who is saying what. I realize both of your mics are open, but we need an introductory of who is speaking. So that's why I'm still doing this.

Thank you.

Here we go.

The minister.

B. DAVIS: I would apologize for my excitement.

CHAIR: You need to spend some time at Hansard, Minister, to just understand how that works.

B. DAVIS: I know, I really do need to spend some time at Hansard. I do apologize to the Hansard staff if I do speak fast. I apologize for that. You wouldn't know it, but I tried to slow down. So this is me slowing down.

The \$53,500 would be an increase mainly based on travel in Transportation and Communications section. There would be a slight increase there for Supplies, as well as Employee Benefits, conference registrations and things like that. It's now becoming a face-to-face world again and travel costs have – I won't say exploded but have gone up.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

I apologize for being quick, too. But when you grow up in Leading Tickles, you'll understand that.

CHAIR: Okay.

P. FORSEY: Given the revised budget and allocation for the Minister's Office, how will the change impact the office's ability to effectively manage its portfolio responsibilities and public engagement?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: It would improve the public engagement piece. It's more along the same lines of just business as usual, for lack of a better term. There was an increase, as I said, based on additional conferences and the distance at which they were.

We have in our department – as the minister, I have three FTP tables that I answer to: biodiversity, labour, as well as environment. All of those have FPT tables where there are meetings that need to be attended and our voice needs to be at those tables in order to – as the Chair would know, when your voice is not at those tables, things happen at those tables that you may not have the ability to control and then you're chasing your tail, and we don't want any of that.

I know the Chair has made significant movement when he was in those decision-making roles to maybe even walk out on meetings to make a point that we're not dealing with some of the changes made.

CHAIR: Are you buttering up the Chair?

B. DAVIS: I think I'm trying to apologize to the Chair for making his life challenging.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

1.2.01, Salaries: Revised in 2024 was an increase of basically \$260,000, pointing to significant staffing enhancements and reimbursement adjustments. Is that the case?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, high salary costs for required positions, partially offset by savings from a contractual position that was retired. That would be the positions that were brought into the department but didn't have a budget allocation to them that we're going to try to fund through savings within the department over time.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

How will the adjustments in the budget for the Executive Support affect the department's ability to provide critical administration and operational support to the Executive Branch?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, a very good question.

We're working very hard within the confines of the budget to ensure that there will be no compromise with respect to services. We have an executive team that is second to none and we need to ensure that they keep doing the fantastic work of moving all of the files in those three different areas in the department moving forward.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

Operating Accounts: There's an increase there of \$37,400. Operational expenses, maybe?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, very good question.

All the workplace fees for the department lie within that section – for the entire department is caught up in this area. We are members of CCME, which is the Canadian Council of Ministers of the

Environment, which would have been a meeting we would have had to attend. Obviously, the COP meetings, which are very important and back to face to face would be reasons why that Operating Account is moved up to ensure that we have executives that are focused on moving that needle forward on climate change.

We have to be in those areas to ensure that investments are coming to this province, which we've seen great investments in this province, but also opportunities to find out new ways of doing things. Whether that is waste management, water resources or, even the environmental assessment process, meeting with regulators in other jurisdictions that would have extensive experience in things that would have come to them earlier than they came to this province, like wind and hydrogen.

Those are important educational opportunities and opportunities that the executive need to understand in order to make the best decisions for the people of the province.

P. FORSEY: Okay, thank you.

We're done on those headings.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

I now call on the Member for Torngat Mountains.

Ten minutes, please.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

I never got a chance to thank you for coming out tonight and just telling you how much we appreciate all the work that you do. The purpose of these questions is, I guess, to generate awareness on our part so that we can formulate and ask questions and also not be duplicating things.

As I heard my colleague ask about the binder – so a binder will be provided?

B. DAVIS: It will.

L. EVANS: Yeah. We still go through the line questions just in case there are some things that are not in the binder but, say, for next year, if we're still here, it would eliminate a significant amount of our line questions because we could be checking the binder while our colleagues are asking questions. It would cut down on time.

Some of my questions were already answered. Just moving over to section 2.1 –

CHAIR: We're not on that section just yet.

L. EVANS: Okay. I never –

CHAIR: No questions on this?

L. EVANS: Nope.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Any further questions from Exploits?

P. FORSEY: No.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Minister, I have some questions I was asked to ask you –

B. DAVIS: Perfect.

P. LANE: – as it relates to the project out in Stephenville and wind in general.

What financial assurances or bonding mechanisms have the government implemented to ensure that sufficient funds are available for the eventual cleanup and restoration of wind farm sites once they reach the end of their operational lifespan?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: A very good question.

As the public would be aware, we had more than 60 release conditions that talked about a variety of different things. One of the release conditions, near the end of the release conditions, was a decommissioning plan that has to be submitted and approved by the minister, our department and myself, in order to progress. It has to be done before any shovels go in the ground.

So that would be part of it. Industry, Energy and Technology is also going to play a role in ensuring that decommissioning is done correctly.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Minister.

I apologize if I'm going fast; I'm trying to get these in.

Have financial planning and budgeting processes been established to estimate the costs associated with decommissioning activities, such as dismantling turbines, removing infrastructure, restoring land to its pre-construction conditions? So it's one thing to say you're going to have a plan. Are you actually doing budget Estimates so we get the amount right, I guess, is the question?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: That would be the proponent in the plan that has come forward for approval. When the plan is submitted, it'll be evaluated, both by my department, as well as IET, to look at the feasibility of that.

Obviously, if there are changes that need to be required, that will be asked of them at that time. Just so you're aware, we were looking at those release conditions to make sure that not only for wind turbines but all of our projects that are happening across the province, we want to make sure they have a decommissioning plan in place. Because we

don't want to have things left in disrepair when things eventually finish.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Sure, thank you.

Are there are regulations or contractual obligations in place requiring wind farm developers to set aside funds or contribute to dedicated clean-up funds to cover the cost of decommissioning? I think you've kind of answered that.

Will there be transparency and accountability in the management of clean-up funds with mechanisms in place to track expenditures and ensure that the funds are allocated appropriately for clean-up activities?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The decommissioning plan will provide us insight into what is entailed in that. It'll be looked at for its fulsome nature to ensure that it meets the needs of what we would want from the environmental perspective, but also for the general public. That's what we would want to see. Obviously, IET is going to play a role in that.

There are many other release conditions that are going to be there. You talked about transparency and public engagement, I think, were words you used in a couple of those questions. There are release conditions that deal directly with community liaison committee development that has to be done prior to any shovels in the ground, as well as a public participation plan that needs to be approved by the minister prior to any activity happening with respect to the building up of turbines or the like of material that would be there.

So we're trying to mitigate the concerns that the public had about public involvement and

ensuring that the proponent has to have complaint and review mechanisms there, how they're going to address those complaints when they come in, how they're going to deal with public feedback for different stages, so the public are well aware of what's happening in their community before it happens.

CHAIR: The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you.

I appreciate that, Minister, but these questions are mostly about the cleanup after, not the setting up part.

The last question here: Have consultations been conducted with relevant stakeholders, including local communities, landowners and regulatory agencies to address concerns and incorporate their input into the clean-up funding mechanism? So not their input into the project, but specifically their input into the clean-up funding mechanism so they'll understand exactly how you're going to come up with the figure, of how much money is going to be held, where it will be held, a guarantee that if at some point in time they're decommissioned, that there will be funds there and how it will be cleaned up, who will clean it up and the transparency around that.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, a very good question.

That will all be covered off in the decommissioning plan that has to be approved.

P. LANE: Thanks, Minister.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Any further questions on this section?

Seeing none, I'll ask the Clerk to call it, please.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you very much.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the next section, please.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 carry?

I'll turn to the Member for Exploits for any questions on this section.

P. FORSEY: What was it, Sir?

CHAIR: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely, we can provide you a list of what work has been done, as well as what lies there. The contaminated sites are not necessarily all controlled by us. We hold the registry for those contaminated sites. So there are different departments that would do that. We can put that together for you and provide that information to you in the future.

Maybe Tara would have something to add. Not to put her on the spot or anything –

CHAIR: Tara Kelly may have some additional comments there.

Thank you.

T. KELLY: We do have a registry of contaminated sites, of the impacted sites for government-owned properties. There are 200 on that list. Then we have also a listing of sites that are covered under the public accounting standard for government liabilities, and there are 20 on that as well, so we would be able to get you information on that.

Other contaminated sites, we may not have information on it if they haven't been identified as part of the impacted sites assessment program. So it kind of, I guess, depends on what you're referring to as being the contaminated site.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: The plastic bag and straw ban has been in place for some time now. Do you have any data on how much waste has been diverted from landfills?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I don't have it readily available, but I think my deputy minister may have some comments on that. If we don't have it, we can get it for you, what we know.

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Snow.

V. SNOW: Thank you.

Just in very general terms, last year there were 180 million beverage containers diverted from landfills through the province's recycling programs, which are administered by MMSB. That is approaching a 70 per cent recycling rate.

We would have to get some more detailed information from the MMSB, a breakdown of the different types of materials and recovery rates for that if you're interested, but as a

general indicator, that was the volume last year.

CHAIR: Seventeen per cent?

V. SNOW: Seventy.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

Oh, sorry, Tara Kelly, please.

T. KELLY: I do have a number here for kilograms per person that's diverted in Newfoundland, and it's 240 kilograms per person a year is diverted in terms of waste.

CHAIR: If you could speak a little louder; 240 kilograms?

T. KELLY: Yeah.

B. DAVIS: I guess in addition to that, Mr. Chair, if I may, just anecdotally, when you're walking on trails now versus when you were walking on trails five years ago, the difference in plastic bags just in the trees and on the side of the road is significantly different, just from an aesthetic standpoint, and obviously from an environment standpoint.

I'm just saying, walk around your neighbourhood and you notice a difference in the plastic bags. I'm not saying there are none there; I'm saying there are a lot less than there were when you do a regular walk in your evenings now. So there is an improvement.

As ADM Kelly said, that 270 kilos or 240 kilos per person is a significant amount of waste that has been diverted. The amount of beverage containers: we're hitting close on 70 per cent recovery rate of getting that recycled. Every time we do that it's a benefit to the province and a benefit to the people because it's less in our landfills, which in turn provides less waste and less GHG emissions on a go-forward basis.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Illegal dumping is creating eyesores throughout the province, outside municipal boundaries, that sort of stuff: Has government got any intent to clean those areas up?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: I'm going to use a famous statement from my colleague the Minister of Fisheries: Stay tuned.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Central Newfoundland Waste Management, they've been burying their wood products for quite some time.

B. DAVIS: Say that again, please.

P. FORSEY: Central Newfoundland Waste Management, some of their wood products are going in the ground: Have there been steps taken to have those wood products diminished?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, so we're always looking at ways we can improve diversion rates. In the province, we've seen an increase over time of diversion rates, then sometimes people get a bit complacent on what they're doing and they take a little dip. I think we're about ready to do some more work on trying to educate the public on ways we can try to divert more.

C&D waste and wood waste is a very good way – it has a value when you treat it in the right way. It can be shredded and used on trail systems around. There are many municipalities that use their wood waste on trails that I've seen. In Deer Lake for one, that I've seen, they've done some really good work on trail systems up there.

We're always looking at ways we can increase diversion. Anything we can keep out of a landfill is going to be better for the long-term sustainability of that landfill, and

also better for the regions that deal with transportation because that stuff is generally heavy.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: But some of that has been in the ground a long time. It's rotted, probably heat, it may catch fire, who knows. But the thing is, how much longer does it stay there?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, I'm not going to sit here and say to you that we're going to be able to go back and get the wood that's been there. It decomposes, for lack of a better term, or rots away, it's inert material. It doesn't hurt the environment from that perspective. But we want to try and divert that so it can be used in a better way, whether it be wood chips or whatnot.

We're always looking at ways with the MMSB to try to increase diversion, if there's a pilot program that we can look at to shred that kind of stuff. I know there was a significant amount of waste stockpiled, C&D, on Fogo that we were trying to deal with and support.

You know, it's not as simple as just saying we want to get rid of it. It's moving this around the province in the best way we can. Made-in-Newfoundland approach or made-in-community approach is probably the best approach for some of those things.

To answer your question, we don't have a plan to go back and get the stuff that is already currently buried but we do have a plan to try and divert it before it gets there.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

The abandoned fish sauce plant in St. Mary's is still a local concern for residents. After years of inaction and deflection, what

is the plan in the budget to clean up the site?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: The preamble was a bit over the top, but I agree with you it's been a long time coming. We have a report back from a consultant that tells us what it is for the town. The town has that report. We've worked with them to try to get that consultant work done. We're working now, as recently as even today, with the MP for Avalon, Ken McDonald, to find solutions. I know he's been talking to Minister Guilbeault. I've reached out to Minister Guilbeault myself that the federal government is culpable in this as well. They funded this fish sauce plant through ACOA.

We're going to be looking at ways we can do that. The Premier is committed to doing something with that. We have the report done. We're working on a solution now to see how we deal with it.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits

P. FORSEY: 2.1.01 Salaries, there's a decrease there of \$273,000: What's the reason for that one?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you very much.

As I mentioned many times, delay through recruitment for vacant positions. Any time we've got a number of staff members there, you're going to have some turnover that happens, whether they retire or whether they move to a different position within government, there has to be a recruitment which takes some time to recruit. So that is the savings based on the vacant positions. I would like that decrease to be significantly less than that because when there are less vacant positions, there is more work being done and less work being put off to some other staff member to do.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: So do you plan on filling those positions this year?

B. DAVIS: Absolutely.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: One quick question, I guess, on that one. With the Pollution Prevention budget experiencing significant cuts in the operational accounts in 2024, followed by the notable increases in 2025, what specific pollution prevention initiatives or projects were impacted by these budgetary adjustments? How does government plan to address the resulting gaps in the environmental protection efforts?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, a very good question.

There has been a reduction of about \$2 million for cleaning up the former military sites. That's a partnership with the federal government, where the federal government has been in negotiation with Indigenous organizations to find some, I guess, for lack of a better term, common ground on where the numbers should be because we're not letting the federal government off with giving us a small amount of money when the cost for that cleanup would be significantly more.

So we're working very closely with them. That's why we knew full well but we wouldn't put it in the budget because we knew it wouldn't be spent in this fiscal year. So we do expect that that money will be expended in subsequent year, hopefully next year, but that's reliant on signing an agreement with the federal government that's agreeable to all parties involved, including the Indigenous governments that would be working towards ensuring those sites are back to a level they're comfortable with, we're comfortable with and the federal government is comfortable with paying for.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits your time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains, do you have any questions on this section heading?

L. EVANS: Yes, thank you, Chair.

Section 2.1.01, I know the minister touched on this. I'm just looking for an update on the cleaning up of the former military sites as well as calculations on what that's projected to cost.

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, good question.

We received \$5.5 million in 1986. I was seven when we received that money. The province has since spent over about \$18 million on this. I'm going to give you a very long-winded response but I think it's going to answer subsequent questions that you may have, as well.

There are eight former Labrador military sites that are currently deemed ineligible. There are draft mediation strategies that have been prepared for all eight sites, which form the basis for a comprehensive proposal finalized in 2019 that was submitted to the federal government Treasury Board.

In June 2020, DND received an official mandate to negotiate a cost-shared agreement with a funding cap of \$23.7 million. Through consultations with Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, and Labrador Affairs, as well as my department, individual working groups were created with five Indigenous governments or organizations with interest in the sites: Nunatsiavut, Innu Nation, NunatuKavut Community Council, as well as Inuit Community Governments in Hopedale and Rigolet.

The cost estimates have increased over that period. We estimate it to be somewhere around \$28.1 million and we want to make sure that the federal Treasury Board covers the increase as well. I know we're going to have costs to that as well, but we're pushing that. So that's why it has taken so long, and I do apologize for that. We want it to move faster as well, as a government, but when you're dealing with three levels of government to try to come to some agreement, it takes time.

We're hopeful that that will be worked out this year, but we won't be able to expend the money this year. That's why that \$2 million is out of the budget for this year. It's not that it's not going to be available to us in the future; it will be. It's just not going to be available this year. We're not going to be able to spend it because there's not going to be an agreement in place that we can get shovels in the ground for. Hopefully, there will be an agreement in place; we just won't be able to start.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you for that answer.

When I laughed at \$5.5 million, I wasn't laughing at your age or trying to picture you at that age, although it would be interesting.

But just staying with Pollution Prevention now, how are the estimated liabilities for contaminated sites currently calculated and how would the Estimates process unfold in future coming up – like, we could put the precise number for liabilities at the Come By Chance Refinery.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, thank you.

I'll take a stab at this one, first, and then I'll turn it over to the deputy or the assistant deputy that may have some more information.

As I've said before, we're the registry for this. Some would be under our purview directly because they sit within the Department of Environment. Many, many, many of them sit in other departments. I would say a significant number of those would be in Transportation and Infrastructure, but putting a dollar figure on them, I don't have that readily available.

My deputy may, or if we don't have it, we can try to get that down for you. The Come By Chance Refinery, obviously, there are issues that would've been identified there and there was an associated cost to those.

I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Snow to see if she has any more light to shed on that. But in addition to that, what we don't have here today and what we can get for you, we'll have over to you.

V. SNOW: Thank you.

So the Public Sector Accounting Board has established a standard, PS 3260, which applies to inactive sites that have environmental impacts, and in order to be considered a liability under this standard five criteria must be met. Environmental standard must exist; contamination must exceed the environmental standard; government must be responsible, or accept responsibility for remediation; it must be expected that economic benefits will be given up; and a reasonable estimate of the amount can be made.

There are 200 impacted sites identified across government departments, as my colleague, ADM Kelly, mentioned earlier. The overall reported environmental liability for these is \$143 million for the 20 sites that qualify under the standard.

B. DAVIS: I told you she would have the answer.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you for the answer.

We didn't write anything down because that's going to be in *Hansard*.

V. SNOW: We can, afterwards, provide it.

L. EVANS: Yes. Also, you will provide additional information, as promised by the minister.

What work has been done over the past year for the Extended Producer Responsibility programs?

CHAIR: Could I just remind members to speak up a little? You're going to have to project a little bit so audio can pick you up.

Thank you.

The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Sorry about that, Mr. Chair, I'll try to speak a little louder. I think you were directing those comments at me.

CHAIR: You are not quite such a problem.

B. DAVIS: I think we're made significant progress in EPR programs. We're finished the consultations off on PPP, printed package paper. That would be an industry-led EPR program where they would have to control the costs. I always give the example that when you purchase a box of Cheerios cereal, the producer who made that cereal has a cost associated with taking care of that product from, not only its development, but right through to the end of its life cycle and recycling side.

In this province, without PPP, we're paying for that recycling without getting that benefit that the industry put in place. So we're working towards that end. We've made some significant movements on that based on the public consultation and working with industry, and looking at best practices across other jurisdictions.

We're getting closer on that file. I look forward to that coming forward, but we do have EPR programs in used oil/glycol, paint, tires, electronics and I think that's it for that. We are always looking for other options. There are people who come into the office all the time that would like us to look at glass and like us to look at batteries and things like that. We're always looking to extend that Extended Producer Responsibility further and I think MMSB is doing some good work on that. Hopefully, in the next coming years, you're going to see more of those expand.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you for that answer.

I was also going to ask about the EPR program being extended into rural areas where it's not active right now – I can just hear a vibration on there, so I'm just trying adjust my mic.

Actually, Chair, when I do raise my voice, I sound angry. I usually look angry anyway, so I just don't want to create any more problems right now.

Have there been anything new implemented in the past year arising from the Provincial Solid Waste Management Strategy?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Very good question.

We're always looking at ways to expand the Waste Management Strategy. We've closed, I think, eight dump sites this past season. We're going to continue to try to stay focused on that and move sites into the larger landfills that exist currently in the system, whether it be Central or Eastern.

There is always hesitancy to do that from communities, but we're going to continue to work with the communities and provide any insight we can, education we can, through

the regional service boards, as well as through MMSB and through the department, to provide any insight to help them make that move as easy as they possibly can.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Yes, thank you for that answer. I do remember I do have another question, but it's in a different section. So I'll raise it when I get to the section that it applies to.

Could we have an update on the Recycle at School program, and are there any plans to expand it further this year?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I know that we've done some work. I don't have this at my fingertips, and I do apologize. I will get an update for you on that. I know that I've been involved in a couple of announcements at schools where we've expanded into those particular schools for recycling. I can't give you the number off the top of my head here today. I will get that information for you, and I'll do that as quickly as we can.

I know that the MMSB has done significant outreach and will continue to do that in schools in particular. It's one of their mandates, it's one of the pillars of what they do and you'll see some more of that over the coming months and years.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

Okay, so we'll be getting –

CHAIR: I'm sorry, your time has expired.

Sorry, I need to go to Exploits.

Do you have any questions further on this section?

P. FORSEY: 2.2.01, are we ...?

CHAIR: Yeah, that's in there.

P. FORSEY: Okay, 2.2.01.

CHAIR: Go ahead.

P. FORSEY: Water Resources Management: How many communities now are left without drinking water, pure drinking water?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Very good question.

It changes, I won't say on a daily basis, but on a regular basis. We've made significant strides over the past number of years. There are roughly 176 over the last number of years. It was up to in the high 200s, so we have made significant inroads there. There are 24 boil-water advisories, the reason is they don't have a disinfectant system; there are 17 that don't have a disinfectant system turned on that they currently have; the disinfectant system is broken for 23 more; then operational problems are another 28; boil-water advisories, residual chlorine is another 82.

So there is a significant amount of impact that can be made by just utilizing the systems that are in place. As you can see, there are close to 100 of those that can be fixed with either education, investment of water operators, which we've put an increase in the budget this year for water operators, to expand those into two more communities: one operator in Labrador and one for the Island portion, that will look at that.

I think we're going to get that number down, I won't say significantly yet, but I will say it's going to move down over the next year, and we're going to see that. It's incumbent upon the municipalities, the LSDs to use – there's a very good funding arrangement, a favourable one both federal and provincial

that I know one of my colleagues, when he was in this role before, when he was Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, Minister Bragg, used to challenge the communities to invest in those areas first before you put in place the shiny new recreation complex; I think you should really work towards fixing your water.

I think that's something that we should really focus on as all MHAs in this House, pushing communities to try to do that and put that funding towards that. We'll be there with the provincial government, as well as the federal government, we're going to lobby hard to expand that.

There's no community that wants clean drinking water that's willing to invest in it that we're not willing to support, to try to help get them there. We know it is not going to be easy. There are some that are challenging, that would be microbiological problems and that could be 13 or so of those 175. So those would be challenging and expensive to fix, but there are systems you can get, like on the South Coast, we've had PWDU systems that were put in place, portable systems that come in that are more cost effective for communities that we can partner with that will allow them to get clean, potable water that can be utilized.

So that is a long-winded answer to say we're making progress. There are still too many. We want to have less than that, but we made changes with the Drinking Water Safety Action Plan that will be both legislative, regulatory and education-wise to make improvements in those areas. There is money in the budget to expand water operators, which has made a difference in moving it from in the mid-250s to where we are today. If we add two more to that system, we should see a marked improvement, when we get those people in place, we're going to see a marked improvement, I think, in moving those numbers down.

I'll be looking forward to being held accountable for that next Estimates when we come back; I'm hoping those numbers are less.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: 2.2.01, Salaries: There is an increase there of almost \$400,000, signaling a substantial rise in staffing cost.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, so very good to point that out by my colleague. This is new funding for new positions for wastewater surveillance program, flood-monitoring mapping and alerting systems, and drinking water improvement initiatives, as we talked about earlier.

Some of that will be good for making drinking water better, some of it will be good for expanding flood-risk mapping and others for waste water surveillance, which is all positive investments that we're making in this budget. I'm very happy that our government has made those investments to make it better for the people.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Okay. Thank you for that.

As you know, certainly, a lot of the smaller communities can't avail of those programs. They just don't have the financial backing themselves. Will this be accessible to all LSDs and small communities, the project funding?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: That's the exact intention of the water operators' program, those additional two individuals. They don't just sit in one community; they sit in multiple communities. They go around helping to train the staff, going in, showing them how to operate their system in their most efficient way possible. Those partnerships are where we get the

best buy-in from the communities. Then the communities themselves have someone to call when something does go wrong with their system, that knows their system well, that can explain to them, well, this is what you've got to do with this pump or this is what you've got to change out now, get their chlorine regulated. All of those things are very, very important and reasons why barriers that force communities not to be able to go in that direction.

I think that answers one part of your question. If I didn't answer the rest of it, please let me know and I'll answer that one.

I don't know if ADM Kelly had something to add to that.

T. KELLY: Yes, I just wanted to point out that the three regional operators that we have currently – the water and waste water operators – they are serving approximately 56 communities. So with the additional two, we're going to see a good increase in communities that are serviced. We also have a number of educational type initiatives ongoing.

This past year, we had a study where we developed a decision matrix for water treatment and service delivery options for small, rural communities. Next year, we'll be working on a mentoring program for small, rural communities regarding drinking water quality issues.

So there is a lot of ongoing work with the department to mentor and educate the communities in how to treat their water properly, not necessarily to go after, you know, big infrastructure but to do things on a smaller scale and more appropriate for their circumstances.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Just to add to that a little bit, just so we're clear where those three current water operators exist: one is in St. John's, one is in Corner Brook and one is in Grand

Falls-Windsor. The two that we're adding will be in Labrador and there will be another one for the Island portion. We don't know exactly where that's going yet because we're still working those details out. We want to put it in the area where it's most needed.

So we're going to be looking at those and the people that are in ADM Kelly's shop know that better than anybody else that are working with that mind to, let's see those numbers go down on that. I'm seized with that, I really am. I want to see those numbers come down. We're going to do everything we can, as a government, whether it's my department or whether it's Municipal and Provincial Affairs, we're going to be working very closely with them to make this happen and see some real benefits over this fiscal year and into the future.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: 2.2.01, Grants and Subsidies, estimated there \$400,000: What's that \$400,000 for?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Just one second, Grants and Subsidies, that's drinking water improvement initiatives, that would be there.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: 2.3.01?

CHAIR: That's good.

P. FORSEY: Okay, we'll go to 2.3.01, Environmental Assessments.

I know it was touched on earlier, decommissioning fees for the windmills. Will there be decommissioning fees for the windmills?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely. I can't speak to the size of those fees at this point. What I can speak to is that they have to have a decommissioning plan that will be approved by my department, in consultation with IET, that we're going to be working very closely on. Before any shovels ever go in the ground, before a foundation is laid for a windmill to go up, before there are any windmills on the ground, this will have to be done as a pre-construction process.

That's non-negotiable. These are legally binding requirements that we put in place, through the environmental assessment process, that is very fulsome and took into account all the concerns raised by the public, but not just the public, the 25 different departments and agencies of federal and provincial levels. We wanted to make sure we heard from everybody and those release conditions, including the decommissioning plan, we didn't come by lightly. This particular project has been in the environmental assessment for almost two years.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: I'll go to the decommissioning fees. So you haven't decided yet how they will be applied to —?

CHAIR: Deputy Minister Snow.

V. SNOW: Okay, thank you very much.

The decommissioning fees, as the minister mentioned, will be set out in the plan that the company will have to put in place. The Department of Industry, Energy and Technology has extensive experience with these types of plans and fees for the mining sector. So they have expertise in development of them and making sure that they are compliant with what the requirements may be.

So specifics about them, what was envisioned for this industry as well, it would

also be wise to direct to IET as to what they would envision in such a plan.

CHAIR: Member, your time has expired.

The Member for Torngat Mountains, 10 minutes.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

Has there been any work done to look at the value of processing organic waste and diverting it from the landfills?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: The short answer would be yes, not enough. I think we've got to start to look at some pilot projects that we will be looking at particular areas. We understand that there is a significant portion of the waste that's going into our landfill and there is an opportunity there, whether it be a commercial opportunity for someone to utilize it and make money from, or whether it's a community-led initiative that we can partner with communities on to see how that works in a particular area, whether it be the Great Northern Peninsula or whether it be in Central Newfoundland.

We've got to look moving the diversion rates and the only way to do that is to look at organics. We're going to be doing that in short order.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

I'm just trying to process what you said there and tie into my next question that's related to organic waste in landfills. What I'm trying to get at here is we all aware of climate change. We're all trying to do our part, the provincial government, the federal government and municipalities. Of course, with landfills, we get methane gas being generated. We know that methane gas is actually much more harmful and

contributing to climate change than carbon dioxide.

I guess my first question, based on your answer would be: Did you say you were looking at a pilot project or were you thinking about putting a pilot project together to divert organics?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The answer to that question is yes to both. Obviously, we need to do some more work on what we see as options. I do believe that we need to do a pilot sooner rather than later, just to get our feet wet into this area, to make a meaningful change, to show people that it's beneficial to do.

It took a while for us to get recycling up to the level and we are at 70 per cent plus now. I think it's going to take time to build an organics plan that works for everybody and it becomes second nature to people. I don't want to leave this area here to say that there's no one in Newfoundland and Labrador that's taking care of organics, because there are a significant number of people who do that, but I think we need a strategy on how we're going to move that forward.

I'll throw it over to Dr. Squires to expand on that from a technical standpoint a bit better than I can.

S. SQUIRES: You're correct, certainly waste contributes to about 70 per cent to our greenhouse gas emissions, mostly through methane, and that's organic waste and waste water. The federal government has waste water clean-up regulations. They also have new methane reduction regulations, so landfills in this province will be subject to the methane regulations from the federal government.

You can look at diversion of waste, but you also are looking at methane capture at

landfills. In smaller landfills, that's a challenge, but Robin Hood Bay has methane capture programs already started and implemented.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you for that answer.

That leads to my next question regarding Robin Hood Bay. I guess that's one of our biggest dumps – landfills. There is methane capture, but when it was being developed, it was about reducing the exposure of odour to residents. It wasn't about reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Right now, at Robin Hood Bay, we do have flaring. In the initial talks of methane capture at Robin Hood Bay, they did talk about using the capture to generate energy, like electricity. So has there been any work on the province's side to work with the city to actually make those steps?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I think I'll see if Dr. Squires would like to add to what I'm going to say. I know the City of St. John's are taking great steps with Robin Hood Bay, and I know that because it's in my district. The constituents that I represent sometimes are negatively impacted by the odour, which you spoke of earlier. I know they've made significant strides in improving that. There is still further to go, but I will turn it over to Dr. Squires.

I guess before I give it over to the ADM, we're always looking for ways we can partner with the municipality of St. John's, no different than any other smaller municipality across this province. Anything we can do to mitigate methane or make the landfill operate better, we'll always be looking at doing those options. There is funding in place, whether it be federal or provincial, to do those things and we're going to do everything we can.

I'll turn it over to Dr. Squires to go through that expansion on that, if required.

S. SQUIRES: Thank you.

Yes, there's been some studies over the years looking at can you use the methane to power vehicles on site, different pieces. Some of that technology is deemed to be, sort of, not cost effective at this point. Not saying that it won't happen, but we certainly work with the City of St. John's, and we have some funding programs that allow them to look at ways to lower their greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the last few years, we've focused on building heat, because that technology is more readily available and cost effective from a ton of emission reduction. But, as we're getting those done, I think we'll start going back to some of those harder to handle and harder to abate emissions, such as methane.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you for that answer.

Yes, and just to sum up that topic there, we're being taxed on carbon emissions and methane contributes much more, but of course with the flaring, you reduce it down to CO₂, right? So we're still going to be taxed federally or penalized in actual fact.

The reason why I just went in depth with this is Robin Hood Bay sort of leads the way. Anything that you can do to make Robin Hood Bay much more efficient and less of an impact in terms of pollution, eventually when the rest of the province is forced, through taxation or penalty or just basically by environmental policy, it would be really good to have something to follow that's successful within the province. So it would be really proactive of the province to start looking at that.

Just moving on now, the next question I'll ask was also asked by my colleague with the Opposition: What measures are currently being taken to combat illegal dumping, and how much success have you had with them?

I know the minister partially answered the question by saying stay tuned, but I was wondering could he expand on that and tell us why we should stay tuned? Is there some programs being developed or policies being developed that would actually address this issue?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you for the question, it was my failed attempt at humour, trying to lighten up the space here.

But yeah, I think indiscriminate dumping and dumpsites across the province are problematic for the volunteers that want to try to clean them up. Currently, there is no program that does that, other than the kindness of volunteers or municipalities that try to support those. Some of those sites lie on Crown land or just on the edges of municipalities, and municipalities are strapped for funding to do those things. So we're always looking at ways we can support the municipalities that we all represent.

One of the things that the MMSB does is they invest in Crime Stoppers so there is an opportunity for Crime Stoppers to let us know, our people, so that Crime Stoppers knows when indiscriminate dumping happens. There have been pilot programs that MMSB have funded that looked at cameras in those particular areas to try to catch the people in the act of doing that as well and to prosecute individuals that are doing it.

At the end of the day, we want to work with municipalities. Currently, there's no funding for that within the department because I have MHAs from all sides of the House

reach out to me from time to time about opportunities that would exist for that. So we're always looking at those and what I said was stay tuned, we're actively looking at opportunities to try to do that.

I would just like to say we're engaged in it. So other than stay tuned, it's about all I can say to you now.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Yes and thank you for that answer.

CHAIR: Oh I'm sorry, your time has expired.

The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: 2.3.01, we'll go back with the wind. There are some questions there on it so we'll stick with it for a while.

B. DAVIS: Okay.

P. FORSEY: Decommissioning: I'll go to the decommissioning, again. It's a big project. We should have learned from the past, no doubt. I can remember in Central, the ASARCO mines. It cost us millions to clean up the tailings at the ASRACO mines; Abitibi, again, the rivers are not fit, the land is not fit, contaminated, even taking the buildings and that down itself cost millions and millions. We don't want to repeat ourselves so we'll try to – I'm sure government is leaning that way to get everything done the way it should be done.

I've done a little tiny bit of research and I know nothing about wind, I can tell you that, but I did see some costs. It might even cost \$150,000 US just to decommission one of those units. That's a high cost, you know, when you're looking at a lot. So the decommissioning fees, would they be paid upfront? Bonds, how – that's a high cost, exuberant cost, no doubt about it.

So what are the plans for it, I guess?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, a very good question and it's obviously something that we're working on with IET. Each individual proponent is going to have to have a decommissioning plan because each one will be slightly different, obviously.

You've talked and highlighted some of the issues that the governments in the past have dealt with because they didn't have the forward thinking (inaudible) of enforcing that. Many of the projects that have gone through environmental assessment in the last couple of decades would have decommissioning plans in place, currently, whether it's a mine or whatnot. I think if we're talking about longstanding things that were developed 50, 60 years ago, that's challenging. There's no doubt.

Going back and getting the proponent to do that, we don't want to be in that situation. We want to make sure that the proponent has a bond in place or a fund in place that takes care of that decommissioning in the future so that the people of the province are not burdened with that.

That's our goal and I can't say any more than we're going to have an approved decommissioning plan before any shovels go in the ground for each and every proponent that comes forward, not just for the Southwest Coast or the West Coast, it'll be in Central, it'll be in the Burin Peninsula, when those projects happen. We've got five or so that are interested in doing that now and probably more. We're going to make sure that those are done for the betterment of the people of the province in the longer term as well.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

Government has proposed 60 recommendations for the projects. Can we get a copy of those recommendations?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Currently, they're online. We can get you a copy and send it over, no problem. In particular, there's a Gazette that came out that has all 60 recommendations there listed. But in addition to the 60, just for full clarity and transparency, there are close to 100 other permits and regulations or regulatory licences that would have to be received from all three levels of government for this project, in particular, to go forward, some would be during construction, some would be pre-construction, some would be throughout the entire life of the project. All three levels of government are going to play a vital role in that.

I was asked a question before: Could that stop a project? Yes, some of them could if they're not done by the municipality. It's a key permit. They're all required to be done and those 60 release conditions plus are all legal in nature and have to be done in that way.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: There has been a one-kilometre radius put in place from dwellings. Where did that one kilometre basically come from? How is that decided upon?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: We've done a lot of jurisdictional scans, looking around the province, but in this particular case, the proponent proposed a one-kilometre buffer between dwellings and – I just want to be clear with the dwellings, that's anywhere someone would sleep, so that's a cabin, a hunting lodge, a campsite. Those are things that the proponent proposed that we put in a release condition to ensure legal compliance to that.

In addition to those release conditions, there are other commitments that the proponent made in their documents that we're going to be holding them to account to. The compliance and regulatory oversight of the

project is going to continue on for many, many, many years to come, until the fruition of the project, quite honestly.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: So would that include remote cabins as well?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Anywhere that someone would sleep that's – I'm going to say that if the cabin is on land that are not owned by the person, on Crown land, that we don't know anything about, that they're squatting in an area that is not their own, how would we know about that? That would be something that would be problematic for that person. But if they're legitimately on land that they have gotten rights to or land right to, it is pretty clear.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: All right. Thank you.

Have there been local community benefits put in place?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: There are at least two release conditions that deal directly with community benefits. They have to have a community benefits agreement plan with IET. Women and Gender Equality would have to have a gender diversity plan included as well. And approved by those different departments.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: What about communities themselves, like in regard to infrastructure, that sort of stuff, with some of those units going on Crown lands, inside of community boundaries, would there be –?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: That is a question that would probably be better asked for IET. They're the ones handling the benefits agreements with the proponents, not the Department of Environment. We have a release condition in place there to ensure that they have them put in place before anything can happen, but they'll be policed, for lack of a better term, administered by IET.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: I know that you have had a lot of questions directed at you guys and companies had a lot of questions directed at them. I've been to some of the meetings, actually, but currently there is no website or sites that – and a lot of it is land use problems, like moose hunting land use, fishing, that sort of stuff, and cabins.

Are there sites that will be put up or those questions answered that any individual could go and see something on those sites? It depends whether through the company or through government.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Through the environmental process, I'll use the example of what the current project just went through. There was a registration period which had public consultation where they put up the information about the project. Then it was deemed that they needed to go further to an EIS, which is an Environmental Impact Statement, which is the highest level we have in environmental assessment. That had to be determined by guidelines.

Guidelines were developed, draft guidelines which the public had an opportunity to review for some 40 days. That insight was put in place and those draft guidelines became final guidelines, which formed a basis for what the proponent had to do for an Environmental Impact Statement, which they filed. Then that came with another 50 days of public consultation when that was filed. On top of that, we deemed it was

necessary for an amendment to that EIS. Then they made that amendment, which in turn came with another 50 days of public consultation.

So there's a significant – I think that equated to about 175 days of direct public consultation in the project. All proponents would have to go through a similar type process. Some may not have all the same steps because they may have more information at the start of registration of a document or not, but they would all have a public component where the public would have the opportunity to voice those concerns, like you just said.

I've always told proponents that you have to deal with the community, ensure the community understands what you're doing, understands, for a lack of a better term, the social licence so if they're going to come into an area, they should be meeting with the people in that area to discuss topics with them.

One of the really interesting things that we did with this project was we took something out of a previous project about a community liaison committee, which is a very successful opportunity for the community to be engaged throughout the entire life of the project to tell them what's happening before it's going to happen so they can prepare for that. They're engaged in that process pretty much from the start to the end of the project.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits, your time is up.

Thank you.

The Member for Torngat Mountains, 10 minutes.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

I'm continuing on with Pollution Prevention, section 2.1.01. I think we bring this up every Estimates. 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 to see movement on this particular study?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

I don't have that information here readily available, but, MHA Evans, I will get that to you in short order after we leave here to see where that is to, what has been done. I know there's been a community group that gets together with respect to that in Lab West. But I want to give you the accurate information of where we're to so I can provide that to you in the future, if that's okay with you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Yes, thanks for the answer.

I just want to ask the question while we have the people in the room. What would be the issue to actually conduct the study? Would it be resources, would it be time, would it be personnel or would it be labs to analyze the results? It's just that we've had several summers where we've had much issue with the dust. One of the things that always comes up in Lab West with the people who live there is the dust problem.

Since I got the people here in the room and we're talking about budget Estimates, I was just wondering why would we be having a delay for this study?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, as I said, MHA Evans, I'll delve into that now and I will provide that to both you and MHA Brown to delve into. He has asked questions about it before – not to the level that you're going to now, which is good. But I will get to the bottom of that.

I know that they have regular monitoring in Lab West. I think one of the issues is that some of the monitors go off at certain times and some don't, with respect to that, I think, when there's an issue if a monitor is down, but I don't have that information readily available. I don't want to go into that until I do. But I'm more than happy to meet with both you and MHA Brown about that in very short order.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

Just a comment on my questions. It's just monitoring is not the same as a dust study. I know the minister understands that. But when you do a dust study you really know the parameters and you really know what you're dealing with and the levels and then you can compare it and you can come up with a dust reduction plan. All the steps that would help us really address the dust situation in Lab West is contingent on this study.

So that's the only reason why I'm bringing that up and just explained my questioning on that. I look forward to you getting the details for us, Minister.

I'm staying on the same subsection. In last year's Estimates, the minister explained that one of the barriers of having the tire recycling facility in this province was on the economies of scale and that a facility like C&D in Halifax could process all our tires that we generate in a single year in one or two days. So it was basically an economies of scale. But later that year, C and C, a company, opened a tire recycling facility in CBS.

So we were wondering what changed in the calculations to make such a facility suddenly viable.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: I can explain that quite adequately. I'd have to check *Hansard* myself, but I don't think I said Halifax C&D, I think Lafarge in Quebec, which is where we were sending the tires at the time, before Halifax C&D came in, as an opportunity in this province in CBS, they were processing our tires. I think what I said was in a day or two, Lafarge could go through every tire in this province and that would be all it would be. So the economies of scale would be problematic for us to have a facility like Lafarge to take all of our tires in this province.

What we've done since that point, since Estimates – and it's great that you brought it up because I neglected to mention, I was going to say forgot to mention – we do have a made-in-Newfoundland approach now where all of the tires that are shredded, the TDA, as they call it, tire derived aggregate, is being utilized within the province, which is great news for the people of the province. There's no trucking cost there. It goes from the locations across the province. However, many sites are across the province, which there is dozens of them. They will come to CBS where they are processed and then for final use in some development, whether it be landfilling or whether it be in road development or whatnot.

There was a complete use of the tires from last year; 100 per cent of the tires were gone that were shredded last year and there were zero tires remaining at CBS at a particular point. Now every time that there are tires come in, there will be some left. But there was complete use of the tires for one full year of operation.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just trying to void some of the line questions because they're probably in the binder, but I'm still under the same section, 2.1.01, Pollution Prevention, under

Professional Services. When you look at it, last year's revised value was \$592,000 less, it was under budget. This year's estimate is decreased by \$490,000.

So I was just wondering, can we get an explanation why we would see these reductions?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, a very good question. That was a forecasted budget reduction of \$500,000 in – we talked about earlier – the clean up of landfills. It's usually a request-driven fund. Some years it's utilized; some years it's not. Last year we utilized, as you've seen there, somewhere to the tune of \$1.4 million, \$1.3 million or something for that. It's over two different sections there because it's Purchased Services as well as Professional Services. So there's a reduction there.

We're going to be looking at, through the Canada Community-Building Fund, other ways to do those as required. Things that don't fit into that criterion, we're looking at other options of funding, as well.

I just wanted to let you know that's what we're focused on there now with respect to that. It's request driven so when we get those requests, we'll be moving on them at the time they're requested.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for that answer.

Just looking at the line item there below, Revenue - Federal: Last year's revenue was \$2 million less than budgeted. Could we have a brief explanation of that?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Absolutely.

As I said, previously, to MHA Forsey, that was a direct reflection of the military sites. The revenue for the feds, we didn't expend it because we didn't have an agreement with the federal government and Indigenous governments. You'll notice that it's not in the budget – we didn't spend it last year so that's why we didn't put it in; we couldn't utilize it that way for when we revised the numbers.

We hope that we'll spend it in the future, for sure, but it depends on the agreement with federal government and the agreement on how much. As we talked about earlier, it was somewhere almost close to \$30 million.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Yes, thank you for that answer.

I'm really sorry, you had already said that. It's just hard to follow along –

B. DAVIS: No, that's fair.

L. EVANS: – with the questions. Some of them are duplicated. Some of them are – like the Member there for Mount Pearl - Southlands, he was asking a lot of the Pollution Prevention questions or the Environmental Assessment questions earlier on in section one. So it was just difficult to follow.

I'm going to move right on now to –

CHAIR: Excuse me, your time has expired, Member.

L. EVANS: Okay, yeah.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Any further questions from the Member for Exploits?

P. FORSEY: 2.3.01.

B. DAVIS: 2.3.01, okay.

P. FORSEY: The Environmental Assessment, just a comment, Minister. This is from the EVREC project in Exploits. I did have some constituents come to me with some issues, I guess, or concerns. I told them that I'd put everything in a file, if they had some emails or whatnot, for the Environmental Assessment, and that's what I have tabulated, put it in a file. I can give it to you, give it to one of the staff, whichever way you want, put it with the Environmental Assessment and then I've done what they've asked, just put through some concerns that they had, if that's fine.

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: That would be fine. What I would say to you is there is no registration for that project yet, so the public consultation, although it's come to you, it's not open yet because there's no registration document yet. I know they've been talking to our staff over the last number of months. They've been talking to community and all that stuff, because I know we've had this conversation on a couple of occasions and I know you're advocating for the constituents you represent. But until we get the registration document, putting that to us, I wanted to make sure it goes through that process so that it can go through there.

I think that's an important piece for them so that they understand. It will be in the bulletin when they register, I'll let you know when they register so that you can let them know as well. I'll take that file the second they register and we'll put it through that process so that their concerns are voiced and heard through that whole process.

CHAIR: The Member for Exploits.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

3.1.01, Climate Change, just a couple of general questions.

CHAIR: We're not in that section yet.

P. FORSEY: Oh, we're not on there yet?

CHAIR: No.

P. FORSEY: Okay, I'm sorry.

All right, I'm done.

CHAIR: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

I know you answered some questions on boiled water advisories earlier, but we do recall your department was trying to – I guess for lack of a better word – force municipalities to address these boiled water orders.

I was just wondering what initiatives are planned to address current boiled water advisories that have been in place for a long time?

CHAIR: The hon. the minister.

B. DAVIS: Yes, very good question.

It's something that we're committed to. The drinking water action plan came out this past year. We've identified that there are some significant opportunities there to help communities. I don't like to use the word "force" communities, because we want to work with them to do this. But it's really community-driven.

We can't go into a community and force them to want clean drinking water for their residents. We can support them. We understand that sometimes it's cost-prohibitive. So we're going to try and work with them on those things, with the federal government and us and a contribution to them.

Some of the things we can do are education, regulatory, opportunities through the two water operators we're putting in. Putting investments in to help them

understand how their system operates is the best way to do that.

Those are all things we're working on and ADM Kelly identified some of those opportunities that we're doing for municipalities or LSDs. I think those are all things that we can be proud of that we're trying to accomplish. This is not going to happen overnight, for sure, but we have made progress. I think some 60 or 65 have been taken off boil-water advisories over the last number of years.

I want that number to be next to zero or as low as it could possibly go. It's something I'm committed to, something all of these people on this side of the House, and your side of the House, are committed to as well, I'm sure. But it's going to take all of us to make that needle move. We're going to continue to do that and those investments of those water operators is one and expansion of those is another step to help reduce those boil-water advisories.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

L. EVANS: Thank you for that answer.

Just looking at the Operator Training, Education. How many people successfully participated in that program last year and how many are now working? I know you referred to three regional operators and two more were coming on. But is that the only people that have gone through this program?

CHAIR: The minister.

B. DAVIS: Yeah, very good question.

Just for clarity, it's not a program, per se, it's positions that were created over the last number of years. Three that currently exist, St. John's, Grand Falls and Corner Brook, and then there are two that we're creating now that will handle – the three that are currently there represent some 56

communities, I think it is, currently. They're working with those 56 communities to increase their water quality and operate their systems better, if they have systems.

Obviously, the next two that will be hired this year when the budget passes, one will be in Labrador, for your direct benefit, as an example, and one will be on the Island portion as well, in an area that would be required. I can't speak to where that area is yet. That's what the officials in Water Resources will be looking at, who are best suited to make those decisions.

We're working as hard as we can for that. I don't know if ADM Kelly had anything to add to that, but she can.

T. KELLY: Yeah, there are a couple of other things. There are a bunch of different initiatives. We have the regional water operator initiative, which the minister was speaking about. We also have the training initiative, the mobile training units that our staff goes out and helps individual municipalities and communities.

We also have an annual water workshop that communities can come to and learn from each other and from our staff as well, and that's quite well attended. I think there was about 300 usually a year and it's hard to get a space in that one. We provide funding to communities to go to that as well.

There are a few different initiatives where communities can partake in education and capacity building.

L. EVANS: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Before, in the interest of a few seconds, just to bring everybody's attention – so in 20 seconds, we are at the sort of allocated time for these Estimates. Beyond that, with the consent of the Committee and the co-operation of the department, we can keep going, recognizing that further discussion

here will be taking off our 75 hours that are allocated for budget debate.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: It will be, yes.

So I just seek direction from the –

CLERK: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Okay, the Clerk has directed me we can have 10 minutes more each for each of the two parties. It's up to you.

S. STOODLEY: We are okay to keep going.

B. DAVIS: I am okay to keep going. There's only one section left; it's just as well to do it now.

CHAIR: I turn to the Member for Torngat Mountains. Do you have any further questions?

This is to finish up 2.1.01 to 2.3.01. We're still on that subheading.

L. EVANS: We're good to go on to 3.

CHAIR: Okay, so I ask the Clerk to call this subheading.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 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: I ask the Clerk to call the final subheading.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 carry?

I turn to the Member for Exploits.

And how would you like to proceed?
Continue to –

P. FORSEY: We're done. We're finished.
We're okay.

CHAIR: No further questions from Exploits?

Any further questions from the MHA for
Torngat Mountains?

L. EVANS: What would happen if I wanted
to go on, like, for 10 minutes, you'll take that
off the –?

CHAIR: This is off the speaking time to the
budget.

L. EVANS: Yes. But it doesn't amplify?
Like, it's not going to be 10 for me, 10 for
him, 10 for –

CHAIR: No, it's just 10 total minutes of
debate in Committee. We use it here or we
use it there, right?

So it's the Committee who has to decide. Is
there any objection to her asking, that is
what I am seeking –

L. EVANS: Excuse me, Chair?

CHAIR: Yes?

L. EVANS: In actual fact, a lot of these
questions, I already know the answer to,
and also the questions that we have, we
can ask in Question Period. So we are fine
with not taking any off the budget time.

CHAIR: Okay.

So both parties have indicated no further
questions, so I'll then ask the Clerk to call
the section.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.2.01
carried.

CLERK: The total for the Department of
Environment and Climate Change.

CHAIR: Shall the total for the Department of
Environment and Climate Change 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 without amendment?

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: So just a couple more points.

Just reminding everyone that there is an audio recording available of these proceedings, available right after this session. So as soon as we shut down, you'll be able to go back and hear your voices again and the details of answers and questions.

So I thank everyone.

Any final comments from the minister?

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the Committee Members, the Academy – no, in all fairness, I'd like to thank the staff for preparation for all this, the people that are here, but the many people that are back in the department that fed into what you've seen here today. This is only a snapshot of the amount of work that our civil service does each and every day.

I am appreciative of what they do, and I know everyone on this side is as well. So I'd like to give them a round of applause for the great work they do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I now would seek a motion where this Committee will now adjourn to tomorrow, Wednesday, April 17, 5:30 p.m. when we'll be reviewing the Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

I seek a mover.

AN HON. MEMBER: So moved.

CHAIR: Thank you and I thank everyone for their attention.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.