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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

Chair: Scott Reid, MHA

Vice-Chair: Craig Pardy, MHA

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

Clerk of the Committee: Gerrie Smith (A)

Appearing:

Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

Hon. Elvis Loveless, MHA, Minister

Jamie Chippett, Deputy Minister

Blair Adams, Assistant Deputy Minister, Wildlife, Forestry and Resource Enforcement

Stephen Balsom, Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture, Animal Health and Crown Lands

Brendan Hanlon, Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Aquaculture

Dr. Daryl Whelan, Director of Aquatic Animal Health

Philip Ivimey, Departmental Controller

Erin Shea, Director of Communications

Paul Baldwin, Executive Assistant to Minister

Also Present

Hon. Paul Pike, MHA, Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development

Hon. Pam Parsons, MHA, Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality

Hon. Siobhan Coady, MHA, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

James Dinn, MHA

Daniel Blackmore, Official Opposition Caucus

Dave Hamlyn, Government Members' Office

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Siobhan Coady, MHA for St. John's West, substitutes for Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber.

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

CHAIR (Stoyles): Good morning, everybody.

We will be doing the Estimates for Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture this morning. First, I will read the substitutions. For MHA Brown, we have MHA Dinn; for MHA Trimper, we have MHA Pike; for MHA Gambin-Walsh, we have MHA Parsons; and for MHA Reid, we have Minister Coady.

Next on our agenda, I am assuming, is a bit of housekeeping information. I am asking everybody not to adjust your chairs. When you're asked to speak, wave and wait for the tally light. Every time you speak, we ask you to say your name and the position before you speak. And, of course, the water coolers are behind us and the bathrooms are just outside the door.

Next, we will do the previous minutes. So I am going to call on a mover for the minutes.

Moved by MHA Coady; seconded by MHA Forsey.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: All right.

Next, we will ask everybody to identify themselves and we're going to start right here with MHA Pardy.

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

D. BLACKMORE: Daniel Blackmore, Sessional Hire, Opposition Office.

P. FORSEY: Pleaman Forsey, MHA Exploits.

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

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Sessional Assistant, NDP Caucus.

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

S. COADY: Siobhan Coady, St. John's West.

P. PIKE: Paul Pike, Burin - Grand Bank.

E. LOVELESS: Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune and the minister of the great Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

J. CHIPPETT: Jamie Chippett, Deputy Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

B. HANLON: Brendan Hanlon, Assistant Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

S. BALSOM: Steve Balsom, Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Lands.

B. ADAMS: Blair Adams, Assistant Deputy Minister of Forestry and Wildlife.

P. IVIMEY: Philip Ivimey, Departmental Controller.

E. SHEA: Erin Shea, Communications.

P. BALDWIN: Paul Baldwin, Executive Assistant to Minister Loveless.

D. WHELAN: Dr. Daryl Whelan, Director of the Aquatic Animal Health Division for Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture and the Chief Aquaculture Veterinarian for the province.

CHAIR: Thank you, everybody.

Now I turn it over to the minister to bring some opening remarks.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Chair.

I won't be long in terms of my remarks, so we can just get ahead with the process here this morning.

First of all, I want to recognize and thank the staff that is with me here, but it is not just them. There are lots in the Department of FAA that do the work, so I want to recognize them and thank each and every one of them.

To begin, I'm sitting in a chair of our late, former colleague, Derrick Bragg, and he was very passionate in this chair. I think we all recognize that, and my thoughts and prayers are still with his family. As I told his wife, he will never be forgotten. So we recognize that this morning. I think it was quite evident, and the deputy minister can witness this, that with his Atlantic counterparts and even ministers across Canada, he was beyond respected and loved by them.

We all know he had a sense of humour and that trickled through all of his meetings. But he was passionate about all things in this

department, and he will always be remembered.

I also want to say that this past weekend there was certainly a dark cloud over Lark Harbour with the unfortunate tragedy of the ocean taking more young lives. Not to describe the story, but knowing that a father, grandfather watched two of his own go down is beyond tough. So our thoughts and prayers are with the family and the community. I think, when that happens, it's the community of Newfoundland and Labrador that's also struck by this tragedy.

It doesn't just happen on the water. We had a tragedy – a mom was killed on Bay d'Espoir highway, four family members aboard. They have serious injuries. So my thoughts and prayers are with them as well. So it was a tough weekend all around, and my thoughts and prayers go out to all of them.

But, on a lighter note, the Toronto Maple Leafs did beat Boston last night. It was my brother's birthday yesterday and he's a big Toronto fan. He didn't take a blood pressure pill this morning, but I told him don't put his blood pressure pills away yet. But anyway, that's to end on a light note and hockey is always good this time of the year. The deputy minister here is a big Leaf fan.

So, anyway, with that, I'll hand it over to the Chair and let the games begin.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Loveless.

No doubt, it was a difficult weekend for a lot of the people here in the province. I mean, my father was a fisherman, so I grew up in a fishing family. I know exactly how difficult it must be for the families.

I'll ask the Clerk to call the first headings, please.

CLERK (Smith): 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: 1.1.01 to 1.2.02.

MHA Pardy.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to extend our condolences as well to the tragedy in Lark Harbour, and I'm glad the minister had stated that. Tragedy is not foreign to us in Newfoundland. We know that it's a sad part of our history that we face tragedy, but each and every time that it happens, it hurts, and our condolences go out to the families and the community and the province in general.

We've had great catches on the first weekend of the crab fishery in Trinity Bay. I just want to put that out there. I was talking to one harvester who went out and I think had placed 250 pots but he had 12,000 pounds. He circled back to the initial pots that he had and there was another 3,200 pounds. He said it was awesome the first week. So that's a good report. I only hope that it happens on the Bonavista Bay side as well.

Minister, on the opening when we look at the introduction to the Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, the Program Funding Summary, just for clarification, it gives the amount of total funding at \$15,513,800 on the initial, but when we go to the last line that ends with the Aquatic Animal Health, we'll find that it's \$10,000 less. That might seem like a trivial piece, I don't know whether that's an error that would have occurred but I would expect those numbers – and I think in the past those numbers would be the same. So at the end there's \$10,000 less when we get to the last line item, but in the summary, it states to be \$10,000.

E. LOVELESS: I'll direct that to the numbers guy.

P. IVIMEY: So the number that you're seeing upfront on the summary page, that's the gross number. So then the total –

C. PARDY: Sorry, it's the what?

P. IVIMEY: It's the gross number.

C. PARDY: Okay.

P. IVIMEY: So that's the gross expenditures and then the amount that you see in the Estimates, that's the net number. So that reflects the revenue figures. There's \$10,000 revenue that's budgeted within Fisheries and Aquaculture, that's the difference. The number that you see upfront is the gross number, you take \$10,000 off it for the revenue and then you're seeing the net number within.

C. PARDY: Okay. My thanks to the numbers guy.

Do we have data that would increase or reflect the increase in the usage of drones in this Department of Fisheries?

E. LOVELESS: Who's the drone expert?

S. BALSOM: Yes, we do have an increase in the amount of drone use across our department. I can speak for Agriculture and Lands, which also includes the GIS and Mapping Division –

C. PARDY: Yes.

S. BALSOM: – responsible for the geodetic mapping for surveys across the province.

We have drones in that division. We have some drone usage, as well, within some of our Forestry divisions, I know from, that is supported by our GIS and mapping, looking at regeneration surveys and harvesting inspections. We have some light drone usage in Agriculture, used in the insurance section for crop insurance when you're doing inspections on large fields. We also have some in our research under Agriculture to be used with sensors looking at trying to find different drought areas or insect issues.

I do have a listing of different uses if that's something you're interested in.

C. PARDY: But we are seeing an increase and is there any particular usage of these that would be in the Department of Fisheries – internal waterways enforcement? I'm just wondering is there any usage of drones that would be increasing within the Department of Fisheries or is it the same?

E. LOVELESS: I can answer it from a general perspective, I guess, is that if we needed to use drones for anything involving the fishery, we sure would use it for the benefit of the department, whatever the project may be. I don't know if anyone else has anything to add to that.

B. ADAMS: One of the drone uses has been expanding in the department, as ADM Balsom has pointed out, but one of the limitations around, at least the forestry and wildlife side, is the Transport Canada guidelines on the use of drones. In order to use a drone, you have to have a trained pilot that has to remain in visual contact with the drone for the entire period during which it's being used; whereas, a lot of our activities occur over a big landscape so you can only cover relatively small areas. So if you're doing a moose survey, as an example, and you have to cover an area that's 2,000 square kilometres and you can only cover an area that's eight or 10 kilometres square within the range of the pilot's line of sight, you have to relocate the pilot every time you want to look at another piece of land.

So for large scale activities there's a limitation based on the Transport Canada rules. But for smaller scale activities, like ADM Balsom outlined, we're expanding the use.

C. PARDY: One of the goals of the Canadian fisheries policy is sustaining rural Newfoundland. I had asked at Estimates in Immigration, Population Growth and Skills last week was there any tracking of the

movement from rural Newfoundland to urbanized areas, and no there isn't. But we know that it's happening in rural Newfoundland. But in all our policy documents is sustaining rural Newfoundland.

Derek Butler wrote an opinion in a CBC article one time not that long ago. He states that "If the goal of Canadian fisheries policy is sustaining rural" – Newfoundland – "and the fishery has produced some very strong economic returns in recent years, including the COVID era, we should be seeing change."

Has the fishery policy in sustaining rural Newfoundland failed?

E. LOVELESS: Has it failed? No, I don't think it's failed. Has it been challenged? Absolutely. There's no government or anybody going to sit in this chair – we try to do what we can, hoping that rural Newfoundland and Labrador will grow. Fisheries plays a very big part of it and all of our policy decisions, and you know, as I know, that it's managed more from Ottawa than it is here. We've always been crying out for joint management, more joint management. There's joint management participation, I guess, from the province's perspective but we wish we had more say in that management piece.

But to your point, it's always to try to sustain and grow rural parts of the province because we know that's where the nucleus of fisheries activity is in rural parts of the province. But it's a changing world, though. We're in 2024 and we don't have fish plants like we had years ago. Technology is changing, it's more advanced. I think that poses challenges for rural parts of the province as well. But all of our goals are towards trying to keep what we have in rural parts of the province and grow it.

In my district alone, aquaculture is big and the supply industry side of it as well. The fish plant, even in Hermitage during COVID,

was continuous. The mayor there said that 99 per cent of his community pays taxes because they're employed. But he's still going after that 1 per cent. That's a true example of rural parts of the province.

So your question is general in nature, and my answer is kind of general in nature as well.

C. PARDY: The only thing I would contend is that it is significant. We all talk about the erosion of our population in rural Newfoundland and there needs to be a plan. Hoping for it grow is one thing, but it would be nice to have some tangible plan to say what we can do to tackle it. And that's a tall task.

I don't pretend that that is an easy policy to create, but as Derek Butler would state, evidence would suggest that if our policy is to sustain rural Newfoundland – and the exception may be your area, Minister, with the aquaculture, no doubt about that. But generally, overall, we are losing our population and losing rural Newfoundland without a visible plan that we can see from that.

I move on –

E. LOVELESS: But if I can say to that, in terms of my district – I use my district, you know, lobster is being done there as well. But I think we have a responsibility – us as politicians – to be very careful with the rural Newfoundland and Labrador promise. Because it is challenging, there's no doubt about it, but I don't want to leave with people in rural parts of this province that I'm going to have some magical plan that we're going to grow the population and grow it and grow it.

It's realistic. I always say, in terms of young people coming into the fishery, let's be real about it. There are not lineups and lineups and lineups of young people coming into the fishery. Do we have to encourage them, policy-wise? Yes, absolutely. But, at the end

of the day, not a lot of young people – because of the nature of the business, it is difficult business, there's no doubt about it.

So on those lines, I think we need to be careful, as all politicians on all sides, to not give that hope – not saying that there's no hope or whatever, because we strive to do better, no doubt about it, but let's be careful and make it realistic for the people who are in those parts of the province as well, and not giving them something that we can't do for them.

I'm babbling on, I know, but it's a conversation I love to have, to be honest with you. If there are any new ideas that come our way, happy to discuss them.

C. PARDY: Absolutely nothing wrong with providing hope, but the genesis of my question was the fact that there seems to be no policy, even though it is the Fisheries policy to sustain rural Newfoundland. But if you had to ask most rural Newfoundland, what's the plan for maintaining or sustaining rural Newfoundland, I think most would be challenged to come up with as to what the policy would be and what the direction would be of the decision-makers in government – federal, provincial. And I would say challenged. That is the piece of which I would mention that.

Let me move to one now that might be a subsection of that policy piece. Has your department looked at the DFO data to see if we are having the concentration of fishing licences in Newfoundland and Labrador?

E. LOVELESS: I would say yes to that. But the other piece, I guess – because not everything comes to your mind when you're having these conversations. In terms of policy directions, I mean, we have minimum processing requirements to keep product here in this province. We strive for that all the time.

We saw the six weeks of turmoil that happened here. For me, when I stood here,

I even wrote FFAW in terms protection of jobs for plant workers. The industry is more than just one side, harvesters, processors, plant workers, we have graders on and we have docking jobs where fish is unloaded. That don't make its way into the conversations sometimes. That's one piece of striving to keep product in the province and jobs here is the minimum processing requirement.

So when you say no policy, that's not correct. We always have the lens of keeping it here so Newfoundland and Labrador can benefit the most.

Now, in terms of your DFO question, I don't know if anybody has any answers for that.

B. HANLON: The department has committed to doing a study, prior to September 1, that will look at things like corporate concentration and other fishery issues that were brought forward by the FFAW. So we will be commencing a study and one of those topics we will be commencing a study on will include corporate concentration of licences.

C. PARDY: Okay, thank you.

If I can squeeze in one more before my time or – up to the Chair.

CHAIR: No, we're going to move on, because you only have a few seconds left. You won't have time to answer the question.

We're going to move on. But, before we move on, I meant to mention that we had agreement that if an independent Member did come, they would have 10 minutes at the end. I just wanted to mention that, just for the minutes, because I meant to mention it before we had started.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I'll join the minister and my colleague from Bonavista in certainly extending condolences to the community and the people of Lark Harbour. In a small community, it's not just a person, it's someone they know, a friend, relative and so on and so forth.

I have a question regarding drones. I've asked it before. I had the opportunity to visit RPM area out in Holyrood. In terms of enforcement – now, I understand the line of sight and relocation but in the demonstration, where they're located, within the line of sight of the drone, they could still, with the cameras, actually pick out the name of the boats down in the harbour. I would suggest it's a significant – even if the person has to relocate and even with the line of sight in a vast area, it can actually cover a significant piece of property and land.

To me, it would be a benefit. It would be one more tool in terms of enforcement officers when it comes to poaching and so on and so forth. Now, I brought this up a few years. So, with that, I don't know if anyone from your department has visited or done the research, RPM or any of the people.

I'm just wondering, what is the reluctance? Again, where their office is located, they're down on the Salmonier Line, the areas that they were centering in was a significant distance away and you can count the people who were on the boat. You can almost identify the facial features, the whole bit. Why wouldn't government be using this valuable tool as an enforcement piece? On anything, aquaculture, poaching, so on and so forth. What's the reluctance, I guess?

J. CHIPPETT: I think I'd echo the minister's comments in terms of if there's a utility, we'd be interested in doing it. I know the department has looked at, I guess, generally speaking, a policy around drones and so on. We did a review of the utility of drones. I think there's absolutely interest in it.

I've never visited that particular company, but I'll pass it over to Blair. I would imagine part of it is the ability to use some of that as evidence but, from an enforcement perspective, I'll just pass it to Blair.

B. ADAMS: Thank you.

We have had some limited discussions with RPM. They've reached out to us and we've asked staff to engage with them, have a discussion about the services that they can provide. So we are in contact.

I don't think there's a reluctance to use drones. It's more finding a way to make it fit within the regulatory obligations and then having the appropriate equipment and training for staff. But, as ADM Balsom pointed out before, we've been expanding the use of drones across a variety of divisions in the department and I see that continuing going forward.

J. DINN: So considering the fact that drones have been around for a while now, how long does it take to develop a policy? I've been asking this for at least – this is probably the third time. So I would say that government seems to be moving at a glacial pace, but glaciers are moving faster at this point in time.

How long does it take to develop a policy and put the regulatory framework in for using of technology here in this to help, if nothing else, wildlife enforcement officers to do their job? I'm just trying to get a picture of it. How long more are we going to be waiting?

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, thank you for your comedy there.

In terms of the policy, I'll make it clear here now: We need to use drones to help the department, and in the division, that policy is created right now. So if that's to help us, whether it's fisheries, forestry or agriculture or enforcement, whatever the case may be, we will use those resources to allow us to

do a better job of what we're doing. But if you got any other directions than why aren't you using drones, by all means, come over, sit down with the staff and have a chat. We are using them to be efficient. Should we use them more? Well, this is a discussion I'll have from this point on. So I'll leave that there.

J. DINN: Thank you.

As I understand, it's being used in surveys, forestry, agriculture, insurance section, research, aquaculture, agriculture drought and insect infestation. So, again, one question: Can we expect that by this time next year when we do Estimates that there will be, at least when it comes to wildlife enforcement in terms of the officers who have to do that work, that we're going to be looking at somehow, we can at least use it in that capacity? Will we have progress or will I be asking the same questions and getting the same responses next year? That's really what I'm after. It will be three or four years by that time.

E. LOVELESS: Well you just listed off where we're using them. It's not that we're not using them, but if there are more specific areas that we should be using them, we'll have a discussion.

J. DINN: Minister, I've been very specific, enforcement, wildlife enforcement, poaching, you name it along those lines, I've been very clear on that in all my questions over the last few years.

Anyway, thank you. I look forward to more tangible results next year.

With regard to vehicles, the use of vehicles in wildlife enforcement and in forestry. I'm assuming forestry officers and workers, there's a vehicle fleet as well. Would that be correct, separate from wildlife?

E. LOVELESS: Is your light on because mine is constant –

J. DINN: It is now, I don't know if it was when I started.

E. LOVELESS: Okay, because mine has been constantly on, so I don't know if they're hearing you or not.

J. DINN: Yeah, mine is constantly, I'm assuming. The light is on.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Yes, there is a fleet of vehicles. In terms of specifics, if you want more, I can ask whomever to comment on that. I guess it's like any division in government, we could use a lot more of them than we have but we try to strike a balance in terms of staff responsibilities and where they're located, but I've certainly put an ask for more, and will continue to do that so they can do their jobs and do it better.

J. DINN: What I'd like is a breakdown of the vehicle fleet for each department according to the age, the condition and the replacement value. We've seen what the wildlife enforcement has to deal with; I'd like to know the quality and condition of the vehicle fleet in forestry versus that in wildlife.

If I could have that, that would be fantastic: The number of vehicles, that includes trucks, snowmobiles, ATVs; the age of them; the condition of them. Because we've seen the condition, certainly with regards to wildlife, so I'd definitely like to have that breakdown. You may not have that now, but certainly having that sent would be fantastic.

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, we can certainly provide that. It's always a conversation; your concern is my concern. I think the statement is pretty common that we can always do better, but we know the reality of financing – taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have to be accountable – but in saying that, there is a need there and I will be striving – I have the Finance Minister here this morning so I can let her know that

I need more vehicles, but she has certainly responded to more value into that piece of this department.

In saying that, that just prompted me, we do have binders here for all of you. I could have given them out at the beginning, but you can certainly take them when you leave here today for yourselves.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Some general questions before I finish.

How many people are currently employed in the department and how many vacancies are there?

J. CHIPPETT: I think we've got breakdowns for each division; we may not have the total. I can tell you there are 266 vacancies across the department.

J. DINN: Out of how many potential employees?

J. CHIPPETT: It depends on the time of year because at this state it would be different because we haven't, for example, got all of our fire staff recalled, but I think it is somewhere in the range of 1,200.

J. DINN: Thank you.

How is the internal review of the fish processing licence progressing? Will the findings result in legislative changes coming before the House any time soon?

J. CHIPPETT: Review is still ongoing, but certainly expected that there would be legislative and regulatory changes at the end of that process.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, your time has expired.

MHA Pardy.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

I want to circle back to the policy piece just for a little bit. I want to reference the Standing Committee of Fisheries and Oceans. It was meeting 70, May 29, 2023, on foreign ownership and corporate concentration of fishing licences and quotas.

Here is an expert that was brought in from Quebec, he was a researcher at Institut de recherche en économie contemporaine and here is what he has said about Quebec: "I have looked at the official DFO data and, for a period of about 10 years, between 2012 and 2021, there have been 465 fewer fishing licences in Quebec" – I repeat for effect: 465 fewer fishing licences in Quebec – "representing a decrease of 8%, while the number of fishers has increased by 34, or 3%. In other words, there are now more fishers sharing fewer licences, which means that we are seeing a significant concentration of fishing licences."

I know the answer was provided that the Committee that we have struck now recently as a result of the protest is going to yield us some data, but are we saying that we don't have that data in our department for Newfoundland and Labrador?

E. LOVELESS: Just for clarification, that's the responsibility of the federal government. I'm responsible for issuing processing licence rights. So the numbers you're saying about Quebec, 400-and-some-odd less licences over a 10-year period, 34 more people fishing?

C. PARDY: Yeah.

E. LOVELESS: Again, I don't have that responsibility so I can't really speak to it, as such.

C. PARDY: No, I understand. All I'm thinking is that if we circle back to the policy I had mentioned before about sustainability in rural Newfoundland, then the concentration of fishing licences is significant. You create wealth in fewer and

fewer and fewer fisheries – and it's on Facebook everywhere. We know that.

Is it significant? Well, that's what the debate is. But you can only debate it once you are aware of the data. I would assume that we have the same occurring in Newfoundland and Labrador. I don't know to what extent, that was the nature of the question that we'd have, but it's an integral part, if we are true to ourselves, that our fisheries policy is to sustain rural Newfoundland and Labrador, that would be a significant piece of information that we have to have when we create some policy or go about that.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, and we recognize that. It's not a conversation – as I say, I'm responsible for processing licences, but the same principle applies. We're at a juncture of, I think, you need to be careful in terms of how many licences we are giving out, new licences and everything else. So this is why the discussions that we had, this review, I believe, is very important at this point in where we are in terms of an industry.

I believe that review, there will be participation from all sides. We will be looking at corporate concentration. We will be looking at regional balance in terms of the product and licences and what we'll also look at are the fishing licences, harvesters in the province. So that will all come under the lens of that review and I think the findings will be important, no doubt about it, moving forward.

C. PARDY: I just want to conclude before I move on to that. I know you had said we're crying out for more joint management. You had said that earlier, and I agree totally. I know that that's a big discussion. It's been talked about for eons, but some kind of more voice that would impact rural Newfoundland and Labrador from federal control, but that's a piece of data that we ought to have. We ought to have that because that is significant.

I just want to read one more into the record. This is from that expert researcher at that panel that has stated: “The concentration of fishing licences, which has been under way for a number of years, is creating two major challenges for coastal communities with regard to the redistribution of wealth and the establishment of the new generation of fishers. To put it another way, the concentration of fishing licences and quotas in recent years has resulted in a concentration of wealth and an increase in socio-economic inequalities among fishers from different fleets, especially between snow crab” ... “and other fishers.”

He says that it works towards creating a barrier for new fishers. We know that we probably have that. So I would leave that to say that’s something that we should be looking into more, looking at what the effect and have the discussion as to what true impact that has in rural Newfoundland, and that’s keeping true to our policy.

Another policy that I just want to mention, there was a fisher from BC that was at that same committee. Here’s what her issue was. She says – and I think it’s got relevance to Newfoundland and Labrador, that’s why I bring it in – “We are seeing fewer and fewer owner-operators participating in the industry. We are seeing fewer boats tied up at the dock. We are watching multi-generational fishing families unable to pass their business down to their children.” True.

“Yet, due to overinflated prices, the fact that the licences are married, or being outbid by larger entities and corporations, it’s nearly impossible for independent harvesters to purchase these licences.”

That’s something that ought to be in our wheelhouse that is affecting rural Newfoundland.

E. LOVELESS: You speak a lot about policy. We are looking for a policy director

over in our department if you want to come over.

But anyway, to speak to some of that, those conversations pieces for those experts that are talking about Quebec and BC. You just touched on in terms of the ability for harvesters, corporate concentration. All of that is within in our purview of the review. Some of the decisions that we made in the last several weeks, I think, has certainly helped. We’ve even heard it from harvesters. I heard it only three or four days ago that there is more competition now in the industry. That’s a good thing.

But I’ve always said, in terms of the policy decisions that we make, move them responsibly and not just making decisions for the making of decisions because there’s public pressure. Because it’s the responsibility of all of us in this House of Assembly to recognize that but move responsibly, not in terms of move fast.

C. PARDY: Yes.

During the protest and in the CBC article – I think it was CBC – we talked about the La Scie fisherman, Jimmy Lee Foss. He was sought after to partner with the processor on a licence and both engaged in a controlling agreement. Do we have a handle on the number of controlling agreements that we would have in our province?

E. LOVELESS: I don’t have a number and I wish there weren’t any. But there’s a reality around that piece. It’s concerning and I don’t want to talk about the person that’s being referenced here because I know it’s a difficult situation. I’ve said it before, even when I was in the department before, in terms of a controlling agreement, that’s not a legal agreement between the two sides, whether it’s the processor and the harvester. So it’s unfortunate these things are happening.

My deputy just – it’s hard to pick out his writing sometimes, but those agreements

are private agreements between two entities. I don't police it. Unfortunately, as the media has reported that there is a case – I'm not sure if I'm speaking out of order here in terms of it's before the courts – that decision has been made on the individual that you have referenced, correct?

I'm not sure, and I don't want to get in to talking about anything again around that media story, of what's going on there.

CHAIR: All right, your time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

In response to the question about legislative changes coming to House in response to the internal review of fish processing licences, I was told that legislative changes will come at the end of the process. So I'm just wondering if we could define when the end of the process might come. Will it be before the end of this year, next year, next election? Just give me some definite timeline because it's a pretty vague response.

B. HANLON: The licensing review is ongoing right now within our department. We have developed six standard operating procedures. We're looking at different things like auditing, licensing, inspection, resource thresholds, penalties, payments, applications, the whole gamut related to fish licensing.

If we had to put sort of a timeline on completion of the review, I would throw out a number like a year and a half to two years before it's complete, because there are so many different processes being looked at. The entire department is involved in this process, plus outside stakeholders. So we want to make sure we get it right and it's a very comprehensive review. So if I had to put a timeline, that's the sort of timeline I would put on it.

J. DINN: That's good, perfect. I appreciate that.

Is there any further work to be completed on the *Animal Health and Protection Act* before amendments can be introduced into this House? Where are we with that?

E. LOVELESS: The work on that is ongoing. Legislation will be coming before the House. Again, I'm reluctant to give time frames because if I do and I don't meet the time frames you'll be up saying, Minister, you said in Estimates.

It's a very important piece of legislation. I know Mr. Forsey is going to cringe when I say this: Stay tuned.

J. DINN: Yes, Minister, rightfully, I'll be on your back about the deadline and rightfully so.

E. LOVELESS: Absolutely.

J. DINN: Because that's what people would expect to have that.

E. LOVELESS: Sure.

J. DINN: I make no apologies for that. I don't think anyone on this side would, but it's good to have at least an estimate so that we can have some idea, otherwise it's ongoing all the time. Stay tuned worked at least when there was a commercial break and the show was going to pick up, but we need to be a little bit more than stay tuned.

What was the result of public consultations surrounding the *Wild Life Act* and the *Endangered Species Act* and how is working progressing on that one?

J. CHIPPETT: Consultations have concluded and I think it's safe to say, based on the preliminary kind of completion of data from the consultations, there was a lot of support for the recommendations. I'd say that was almost universal to everything we

consulted on, particularly around fines and so on increasing.

The *What We Heard* document is in draft form and then following that we would work with our friends at Legislative Counsel to get a draft.

J. DINN: It was successful, but how many people would have responded or in the consultations? Would you have an estimate?

J. CHIPPETT: I'm going to ask Blair if he remembers that number.

B. ADAMS: I don't have that number on hand there now, but I can certainly get it for you.

J. DINN: I appreciate it.

Will the department commit to implement all nine recommendations from the Fish Price-Setting Strategic Review Team?

E. LOVELESS: Just for clarification that's not a question for me; that's a question for another minister in another department.

J. DINN: Perfect. Thank you.

In 1.2.01, are there currently any vacancies in this section? If so, what positions are vacant? I know you gave me 266 out of a possible 1,200 within Executive Support.

J. CHIPPETT: There is currently one vacancy.

J. DINN: What position is that?

J. CHIPPETT: It's a communications manager position.

J. DINN: Thank you very, very much.

Also, in 1.2.01, Employee Benefits, I notice it's gone from \$122,000 down to \$100,000. What is the discrepancy there or the reason for that?

E. LOVELESS: So you're at 1.2.01, correct?

J. DINN: Yes.

E. LOVELESS: You said Employee Benefits? I think you mean Transportation and Communications.

J. DINN: Okay. That's it, perfect.

I think in 1.2.02, Operating Accounts, it seems to be in some ways unanticipated expenses. It went from \$5 million in '23-'24, revised \$7 million-plus, and then down to a little over \$2 million. How do you account for that, please?

J. CHIPPETT: You'll see in some of the headings in Forestry that we negotiated a federal-provincial agreement with NRCan for increased resources for wild land firefighting. So when that agreement was negotiated, we didn't know exactly where all the funds would be spent. This is a Capital line, so when we knew we wanted to buy some new vehicles and equipment, the funding was redistributed to this Capital line.

The other expenditure there, in terms of the original \$5.1 million, the vast majority of that was for a four-year infrastructure project for Salmonier Nature Park.

J. DINN: Okay.

How is that progressing, the infrastructure for Salmonier Nature Park? I've driven by it a few times since. It looks impressive as it is, right there.

J. CHIPPETT: This was primarily around the boardwalk and then to update a bunch of the animal enclosures. I know we had to do some extra work this year from an accessibility perspective, so it has been greatly improved. You will see some changes in terms of landscaping and so on around that building. So it is going well.

J. DINN: Perfect.

That's it for me, Chair.

CHAIR: MHA Parry, do you have any questions on this section?

C. PARDY: Yeah, I have a couple more.

In *A Review of Foreign Investment in the Newfoundland and Labrador Fish Processing Sector*, in that review, it states the fourth recommendation is that your department "will undertake an internal review of the fish processing licensing with the goal of enhancing data collection, analysis and reporting."

Can you give us an update on that?

J. CHIPPETT: I think I will just point to Bren's answer to MHA Dinn, that's the one where we're looking at everything from applications to the kind of business information that companies need to provide to us. That was one of the other recommendations from that review.

So in terms of legislation, I think Bren said a year and a half to two years.

C. PARDY: Okay.

This came about as a result of the protests that were here? Was this the action, the Committee that was struck? It's not. So what are we referring to, the work, are we referring to a separate committee here?

J. CHIPPETT: I guess we're talking about two things: number one is that report was commissioned long before the protests.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

J. CHIPPETT: And the review that is talked about in the fourth recommendation, I would call it more of a technical review that focuses on how government engages in the business of taking in data from applicants for fish processing licences, all the way to the instruction that the government gives to the board that makes recommendations on

fish licences and so on, and the associated legislation.

The other review that we've committed to, after discussions with FFAW and harvesters, we've said in writing, by September 1, we would start that. That would look at elements such as corporate concentration, it would look at broader policies, to some of your questions from earlier, around fish processing, licence allocations in the province.

C. PARDY: Good. Thank you very much.

I know I'm conscious of the time here and we've got to move on, because I know the Chair is anxious to move on from this section.

The last question here would be – in the Budget Speech, in the section on Fishery, the first paragraph says: "Our important fishery employs approximately 16,000 people" I know the word "approximately," but last year it was 17,500 from 400 communities. Do we have any idea of what the 1,500 drop in employment is? Because if those numbers were looked at from last budget to this budget, then that's a pretty significant drop in the fishery.

E. LOVELESS: I don't have that data here, but we'll take it back and we'll get back to you on that one.

B. HANLON: We do track processing plant employment year over year and we can provide the year-over-year change in processing plants. In the 90 licensed plants we have in the province, we tracked all that. Harvester, sort of, numbers is federal jurisdiction. So the feds would be able to provide more harvester, but we can provide processing plant employment for sure, year-over-year changes.

C. PARDY: How many plants on the Island that do not have foreign workers?

B. HANLON: Are there any that don't? Is that what you're asking?

C. PARDY: Yes, or how many –?

B. HANLON: The large majority don't have temporary foreign workers.

C. PARDY: Do we know exactly how many plants?

B. HANLON: Yes, we do know. I'm thinking the number with temporary foreign workers is 15. It's within one or two of that. That's the scope you're looking at.

C. PARDY: How many plants without foreign workers?

B. HANLON: So there are 90 licensed facilities, so there would be 75ish without.

C. PARDY: Without, okay.

Thank you, Chair, for your patience.

CHAIR: You're welcome.

I ask the Clerk to call the headings, please, for this round.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.02 carry?

I call for the question.

Moved by MHA Parsons; seconded by MHA Pike.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: All right.

I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings, please.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 carry?

MHA Pardy.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

In last year's Estimates, it was stated that nobody is knocking down the doors to the department to talk about seals or anything to do with seals. I had a picture sent to me from Gros Morne the other day where drivers were driving by and, on the shoal area, there were a lot of seals.

I think we're all aware of how significant it is; they forage for food and it's the commercial stock that they forage. Last year's Estimates, the previous minister had stated we have a big problem and we are nowhere close to an answer.

I ask, has there been any action in relation to the excessive seal herd from last year to this year?

E. LOVELESS: The topic of seals is easy from your lens, and I say that with all respect, because we see the videos, we see the pepper on the ice and all that stuff. We recognize that.

I don't come here today with an answer. I wish I did, but I can tell you there have been several conversations, several meetings we've had with the federal minister, and she's certainly interested in and she's aggressively seeking what the answer can be. Because we know some people will say, well, cull them. That's not the answer.

I think it's like any product, we have to find the markets, because some of the markets that were strong, if I can use that word,

have not been so strong. The federal minister said that as well that we would need to target those markets again and move that product.

So I think that's a positive step for Newfoundland and Labrador and the whole of the industry is that we have a federal minister that is really aggressively going after the solutions that we can have for seals because we know what it's doing. I know you referenced it as well about they don't eat Kentucky Fried Chicken, so we know that. They're eating species that really is destroying the livelihoods of fishermen.

So it is a major concern, but in support of that as well, under the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, we have projects that are supporting the sealing industry and we will continue to do that. I've had conversations with people around this province about the sealing industry, and there's great interest and I think there's going to be positive stories to tell moving forward, even in this year, and I'll be happy to tell them.

So that in itself is positive, that we have a federal minister, and we're certainly eager as a province to help find the solution.

C. PARDY: So there has been no tangible action since last year? I say that respectfully, too, because remember now, we're not catching close to the federal quota. We know that. It's not that we want the federal government to increase it by another 250,000. Nobody is asking that. It is with us to catch more of our quota than what we have in the past years. That's what we need a tangible action on. We need a tangible action on trying to increase that amount that we harvest each year. That was the genesis of my question: What tangible action?

E. LOVELESS: Your answer to the tangible action is that what you're referencing is a decision to be made by the federal minister. In terms of harvesting of quotas or licences for them, that's DFO. The stuff that you're

saying to us, we're saying the same thing to her and pressing upon her.

C. PARDY: Minister, just to move on, and be respectful of the time. On the sealing quota, DFO has 450,000. We've had recent years where we haven't broke 100,000. We haven't even got 20 per cent of that quota.

The quota is not the problem; DFO presents the quota. The problem is, with us, whether we haven't incentivized or we haven't had initiatives to increase the amount that we catch. That's with us; that's not DFO. I'm not coming here today as the Member Opposite and say the DFO ought to – I agree, no cull; I agree that we don't need an extra quota, we just need to bring ourselves past the 20 per cent mark of the harvest that we do that DFO has presented us with.

That is the nature of my question and I don't think that's such a tall task. If you ask some people, I think we can make some decent inroads on that. That was the nature of my question.

So DFO has done their job and gave us the quota; we need some tangible actions in order to increase the harvest of those seals. That's policy on this government in some cases. I wish I had more to go into.

E. LOVELESS: Right. Well, this is not rocket science.

C. PARDY: Nope.

E. LOVELESS: We're talking about markets. So if you know some markets that we don't know about, I'd be happy to explore them, and it's being explored. So that's the solution here, that we find the markets. We've got no problem in issuing or whatever rights I have under my jurisdictional responsibility to increase the number of seals and the processing or whatever the case may be.

Again, it goes back to the markets, even in Boston, same conversations. So from a

global perspective, the wheels on that are turning and I'm hoping that next year, if I'm here, if you're there, then we will probably have a better conversation around that.

C. PARDY: Yeah, I'm going to move on from that, even though I enjoy the conversation on that.

I'll mention two individuals, and I did a little bit of reading on both of them, on their research and what articles that they put out. Has the department ever met with the couple Barry Darby and Helen Forsey?

E. LOVELESS: Are they in your district?

C. PARDY: No, I wish.

E. LOVELESS: I have not, but I've chatted with lots of people in this province, a person like Keith Bath who is quite familiar with the sealing industry and where we should be going and all that. I'll be having more conversations with him, but in terms of those individuals, I have not.

If you're telling me that it's probably worth my while to have a chat with them.

C. PARDY: Yes.

E. LOVELESS: Absolutely.

C. PARDY: I've never met the couple. They live in St. John's. I think they're both have science backgrounds and their writings are pretty inspiring when I look at the direction in us moving forward. They looked at what is called effort-based management, as opposed to the quota system.

Now you're going to say well, that's federal. It's not because it is something that we ought to be looking at. The example that they've used in their writing is the lobster fishery, the success of the lobster fishery.

Effort-based management means there's no quota. So the season would open, May 8 to July 13. The nature of the equipment of

which they use is restricted. That means that they've got standards on the use of their equipment, the pots that they utilize to make sure that the young ones get away. When they harvest lobsters, the spawning lobster, they're V-shaped and they're put back in the water and they're not harvested.

So the way the lobster fishery is ran, it's not on a quota system, it's regulated on the time they can catch, what equipment they can use, the spawning biomass is not taken into shore and they would say that is a system that we can have for other species like cod. So we go out and we use our gillnets and we take the spawners, the super spawners and we're taking everything in, we do that.

What they're saying is that it should be an effort-based management and if we followed the effort-based management – and remember that is regulated and there are standards at which they have to go to make sure that we can serve our species.

So I throw that out, because I know the Chair – this couple, I would suggest that you would meet with. I know that I would if I were in your spot because I'd be intrigued with what they've written. I'm intrigued in what they report. When we look at the fishery going forward, I think this is something that we probably can have a serious look at and drill down on and maybe after the powers that be look at it, can advocate for.

E. LOVELESS: I'll give you a prime example of effort-based management for the lobster fishery. Down in my coast and a lot in the province, the fishermen took their own effort-based management on their own shoulders when they did V-notching and everything.

C. PARDY: Part of it, yes.

E. LOVELESS: The last 10 years, not just in my area, but the efforts of the fishermen because I think fishermen realized that we have to be responsible for the lobsters, what

we're catching, what we're releasing and v-notching and stuff. It was beyond successful and I believe that's why the catch rates are where they are today and hopefully they'll remain successful, but that effort-based management is already happening and it's from the boats.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

2.1.01, Marketing and Development: It notes that it is there to "provide for market intelligence and market development support to the fishing, aquaculture, and agriculture industries, and for seafood innovation and development activities."

What is the percentage of this budget that goes to aquaculture in terms of marketing and development?

B. HANLON: I guess to put a sort of a ratio on it is difficult, but we have our seafood development grant program, which is \$200,000. I'm just having a quick look now. There is definitely one for the aquaculture promotion campaign. There is a mussel and oyster farm project. So at least \$50,000 of that \$200,000, for instance, has gone towards aquaculture.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

What involvement has the department and the provincial government generally had in advocating for a greater share of the redfish quotas and if you could identify any challenges that you have come up against?

E. LOVELESS: The challenge is the federal government. We met with the minister and clearly said to her what we expect from this redfish fishery. We were beyond disappointed and made that clear through a writing campaign, from letters and certainly meeting with her on three or four different occasions. I attended a rally in Corner Brook as well with FFAW and various politicians, MHAs that were there, to press

upon her – because the downturn in the shrimp fishery there, those shrimp harvesters were counting on that, this would be – I don't know if I can use the word – lifeblood for them, but in terms of this announcement, it wasn't and we made it very clear and we're continuing to make that clear.

They do have a committee that's struck and the minister has said – I don't think there has been any announcement on it – we went back to her in terms of asking for more, certainly in support of FFAW as well. We're hoping that a different decision will be made. She said that whatever the committee proposes to her, she certainly has an open mind as to what that amount will be in terms of a catch.

We've also proposed, in terms of a financial help for those fishermen as well, to get them out of the fishery, that want to get out, retirement age and other considerations as well.

We're going to continue to push for more of that quota that the harvesters are equipped to do, to fish.

J. DINN: We met with the Darbys, actually, in relation to red fish and a number of others, but they are worth having a conversation with because, again, a thorough analysis, whether you agree with the analysis or not, they come from a knowledge-based perspective.

What actions have been taken as the result of opportunities identified by the Fisheries Advisory Council in their action plan that was released last June?

E. LOVELESS: I'll leave it open for staff to answer some of it, but I just want to speak on that Fisheries Advisory Council. I think it's one of the best-found committees that you could have, because you have every eye of the industry on that committee. They do great work and the last meeting we had I said the same thing to them.

They're not just about meeting for the sake of meeting and having discussions, they target solutions and I certainly value them and their work of what they do.

I don't know if, Bren, you have any further comments on that?

B. HANLON: So all the actions from committee meetings are tracked and updates provided. I don't have my hands on the update right now, but we could certainly provide the minutes from the latest committee meeting that would provide an update on the action items from the committee.

J. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

I'm assuming that'll go to both of us anyway.

B. HANLON: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, perfect.

I noticed in 2.1.01 that there are a number of variances in terms of Transportation and Communications, Supplies, Professional Supplies, Purchased Services and even Property, Furnishings and Equipment.

Rather than ask individual questions, maybe there's a commonality there for the variances?

E. LOVELESS: Yeah. I will try to sum it up for you.

J. DINN: And Grants and Subsidies as well.

E. LOVELESS: As you said from Transportation and Communications down to Grants and Subsidies, the variances – and I'll try to use some common reference words in here – can be due to less than anticipated travel and communications; supply expenditures lower than anticipated; variance due to additional expenditures required for market reports to support fishing industry collective bargaining; slightly higher than anticipated costs associated

with attending conferences and trade shows; and we have some less than anticipated Property, Furnishings and Equipment.

So I don't know if that sums it up for you?

J. DINN: That's good.

The number of conferences and trade shows, that's in the binder, I guess, that have been attended, I would assume.

B. HANLON: So the big ones for this group are the SENA Boston seafood show, there's an Asia seafood show, North Atlantic seafood show, and an International Prawn Forum. Those are the biggies for that group.

J. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

In 2.1.02, Licensing, Inspection and Quality Assurance, are any vacancies here and, if so, which positions?

B. HANLON: There were 10 vacancies during the year. Four of those have been filled now. They include – they are also four seasonal positions that were vacant, licensing administrator and five fishery field reps.

So there's a bit of turnover in the fishery field reps. But the good thing is we have 14 different locations, so we can move people around as needed around those locations, and they can cover off for each other. That's what we've been doing.

J. DINN: Last year, Operating Accounts ran over budget. What was the reason for that? I think it went from \$148,000 to \$209,000 and now it's back down to \$148,000.

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, again, that encompasses all of it there, so I'll try to help narrow it down. There are a variety of reasons here: higher than anticipated travel expenditure in the year due to fisheries audit required work; there was a requirement to purchase uniforms and other

PPE for inspection staff; variances due to higher than anticipated Purchased Services expenditures, meeting rooms for rentals for our fish processing board meetings, and room for use of forest training.

So that's kind of the nucleus of the difference there.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In 2.1.03, the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, appropriation is to provide for the support of the fishing industry's transition to groundfish and support of growth in the aquaculture sector through innovative programming and partnership with the federal government.

Again, I ask there, what is the percentage – in particular, I'm looking at not just all aquaculture, but finfish aquaculture, open sea pen. How much of this percentage here is going to support the growth of aquaculture versus the support for the fishing industry's transition to groundfish?

B. HANLON: Since the program began seven years ago now, out of the 496 projects, 28 were for aquaculture, so about 10 per cent of the value. So there's \$10 million worth of aquaculture projects.

J. DINN: And that's for all aquaculture. How much is for finfish?

B. HANLON: I'd have to go through each project. But I can certainly get it for you, but I don't have it at hand.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

You brought up the issue of a closed containment system, the donut, so that would basically solve many of the issues around the open sea pen aquaculture that associated with it. Has there been any further discussion in the department or looking into that, the use of the aquaculture donut? Which would also, as I pointed out, allow for the construction industry, innovation, you name it.

E. LOVELESS: Yeah, I attended Aqua Nor in Norway last August and that piece of the industry is developing, but there are still questions around even that side of the development of the donut. Because I was inside of one and talking to the guy who, really – I don't know if he's the founder of it, but he said there are still a lot of uncertainties, but they're moving forward with it.

Yes, there are discussions in the department around that, for sure, but that's a costly venture in terms of constructing it. So there are a lot of unknowns yet around that, but it's something that obviously we'd be interested in seeing how it all unfolds. But before that time then that's the extent of where we are. But discussing it for sure.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Pardy, do you have any further questions?

C. PARDY: Just a couple, Chair. And I'm respectful of the time. I know we've pretty well reached – one of the Atlantic Fisheries Fund investments, and along with ACOA, was the seafood storage and cargo facility in Gander – good initiative. Where are we with that? Is it still in the early stages, in the planning?

J. CHIPPETT: We could get you an update on that, but I don't think we have a status here with us this morning.

C. PARDY: Okay, good, that's fine. Thank you.

Resource Enforcement Division: We know that they're all pooled together and now coming under one entity, everyone working together to do that, a couple of years ago, maybe. Do you have the figures on the number of violations that we've had in the past couple of years since they've been – and maybe even some historical data?

B. ADAMS: I don't have the historical data on hand, but I can give you the most recent year's statistics, if that works?

C. PARDY: Yeah, okay.

B. ADAMS: So for 2023, we had 69,081 patrol hours. We had 28,527 interactions with the public. That breaks down to 1,068 complaints; 26,173 inspections; and 1,286 investigations. Of those, we had 1,512 violations or occurrences, which breaks down to 692 warnings; two stop orders; 692 SOTs, which is a ticket; and 110 (inaudible) charges. We had 2,376 environmental management system inspections.

C. PARDY: I received an email recently and I'll just read an excerpt of that and then you can speak to that. Currently, with resource enforcement, there are now no more after-hours responses for poaching, zero overtime and per diems have been cut. Work trucks are now parked at all offices and many of the enforcement officers will have to drive two hours in order to get to that truck. They have stated that you would expect those violators to operate from Friday from 9 to 5 or 8:30 to 4:30.

So it was an unflattering email and I just want to throw that out as to some feedback as to would any of this be due to any actions on behalf of this joint enforcement?

E. LOVELESS: Well, I don't know who sent you the email, I don't know if it's factual or just somebody's opinion because they feel that things are not the way they used to be. I've delved into some complaints and it's just been somebody's opinion because it's on emotion.

Whether it's enforcement officers, we certainly are looking at and will continue to look at whether a vehicle is parked at an individual's home or at the office around response time or their responsibility as an enforcement officer because we know the geographic and demographic challenges

around the province, but we strive to do better.

I think everyone would like to have their vehicle parked at their home. If that makes sense from an operational perspective from a lot of levels, then, yes, we will certainly strive to do that. But at the end of the day, it's to allow them to do their job and do it better. If we made a decision that is not the right one, I'm not afraid to take another look at that positions.

C. PARDY: Madam Chair, I yield my time now out of respect for my colleagues for the other areas, and I thank the department for the engagement.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any further questions on this subject?

J. DINN: I'll probably cherry-pick for the last few, maybe three or four at the most.

In 2.1.04, what work has the department conducted in the last year in collaboration with the federal government on planning or drawing up mitigation strategies for how climate change might adversely affect fish stocks offshore?

J. CHIPPETT: So this is the primary division in the Fisheries and Aquaculture branch for engaged in it with the federal government. There are three things listed there that our staff in that division are regularly engaged in. One is on individual fisheries assessments, so that resource quota, TAC setting process. We would always feed our position in there and look out to the interest of our stakeholders.

I think from a climate change perspective, one of the biggest things, or I guess where that is discussed the most, is our consultation on marine protected or marine conservation areas. Then there's also collaboration on coastal and ocean policy development. I know that I co-chair a group, along with the regional director general, so there's constant contact on these matters

and climate change is certainly a part of discussions and the science with respect to fisheries assessments, but also during ROCOM is the acronym. I'm not exactly sure, it's the Oceans Committee, I guess I would call it. So we're looking at marine spatial planning and maps and so on with respect to ocean areas that could be protected. But also, ocean areas that could be subject to future development so all the data is gathered in one spot.

J. DINN: Okay.

In 2.2.01. Aquaculture Development and Management, we know that monitoring is done by the federal government but has anyone in your department heard anything or seen data regarding the mortality rates for wild salmon stocks lately? If so, has that number changed to any great extent when compared with previous reports?

E. LOVELESS: Just for clarification, we're into 2.2.01?

J. DINN: 2.2.01, yes, Agricultural Development and Management.

E. LOVELESS: Are we into those because I thought it was up to –

CHAIR: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Just for clarification.

Now that longwinded a question, I –

J. DINN: Basically, I'm just looking at, if you want to boil it down, has to do with the data regarding mortality rates for wild salmon stock. There was a report, Rob Kelly, I think with DFO, but the mortality rates for wild salmon stocks and what you're noticing in terms of the changes compared with previous reports.

J. CHIPPETT: I'm aware of, I think, an update to a report that was done initially by

Dr. Ian Bradbury around genetics and kind of looking at each of the designable units for wild salmon, but I'm not aware of mortality data that you referenced, or changes in it.

J. DINN: Thank you.

E. LOVELESS: If I may, I attended a meet and greet at the Newfoundland and Labrador Outfitters Association trade show they had in Gander this past weekend. It was sponsored by the Atlantic Salmon Federation. There was a guy there that certainly talked about rivers, challenges, but it was a positive report from him. There are initiatives that they're taking, which was good to hear, because we recognize how important that industry is to the province from a tourist perspective, from the recreational piece and people's enjoyments of being on the rivers.

So I just wanted to put that in there, that it was a positive meet and greet and there was a positive conversation around where it's all going, which is good.

J. DINN: Thank you.

How many escapes were there from salmon pens last year?

B. HANLON: There were zero confirmed escapes from salmon pens last year.

J. DINN: Zero confirmed.

I think there's a percentage, there's a threshold which is reported, over 10 per cent?

B. HANLON: So there's public reporting required, if it's over 10 per cent. It's my understanding, but just to clarify, there was zero confirmed escapes from pens last year.

J. DINN: Zero confirmed.

Thank you.

In 2.2.02, Aquaculture Capital Equity Investment: What is the source of the one-time provincial revenue?

J. CHIPPETT: That's made up of dividend and redemption payments from Newfoundland Aqua Service Limited. So they would have engaged with this program previously. They are one of two companies that are currently engaged with us through that program.

J. DINN: Thank you.

One final question: With regards to the processing of the aquaculture salmon, I'm looking at what type of processing occurs and the percentages. At one time, it was 80 per cent, I think, head-on, gutted and shipped out. I'm looking at secondary processing and so on and so forth. So a breakdown of the fish that is raised in our waters, pollutes our waters and so on and so forth. I'm just trying to get an idea of what percentage of processing is actually taking place, secondary and otherwise, that's actually going to keep people, other Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, employed as well. I just wanted a breakdown if it's possible to have that.

E. LOVELESS: I don't have a percentage in front of me to give you; maybe we can provide it.

J. DINN: Yes, perfect.

E. LOVELESS: But it all depends on the markets, as well. I visited the sites in New Brunswick versus our fish plants' capacity. You know filleting was higher years ago, markets can call for fillets. It can change; therefore, it determines what they would be doing at plants and stuff, but I'm with you because I've met with management in New Brunswick that filleting, secondary processing, we want more because it keeps that work localized. So that'll always be a concern for us, but, again, markets kind of drive that process.

J. DINN: Perfect.

Thank you, that's it, Chair.

CHAIR: All right, I see no further questions, I ask the Clerk to recall the subheadings.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

CHAIR: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01.

I ask for a mover.

Moved by MHA Coady; seconded by MHA Forsey.

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 next set of subheadings, please.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive, Forestry and Wildlife.

CHAIR: 3.1.01 to 3.3.02.

MHA Pardy.

E. LOVELESS: Madam Chair, maybe (inaudible).

CHAIR: Take a break?

C. PARDY: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Okay, why don't we take a 10-minute break and we will resume in 10 minutes.

Recess

CHAIR: We're back after a short break.

MHA Forsey is going to be asking questions next.

MHA Forsey.

P. FORSEY: We're ready?

CHAIR: Yeah, when you're ready.

P. FORSEY: Okay, 3.1.01, I've just got some general questions to start off with.

Can we get a breakdown of the forestry allocations for pulp, logging and domestic in 10, 11 and 12?

B. ADAMS: Just give me one moment there and I'll pull up those numbers.

So the AAC for those districts, for 10 it's 15,500 cubic metres; 11 is 148,800; 12 is 156,800; and 13 is 20,000, which is an extra one there. But the total for 10, 11 and 12 is 321,100 cubic metres per year.

P. FORSEY: Can we get a breakdown of who's got access to those permits? It doesn't have to be right now; you can give that to me later on or whatnot, you know, just –

B. ADAMS: I don't have the entire list, because it's fairly extensive, it's a lot of small operators, but I did pull together the top five operators in those districts, which account for about 90 per cent of the allocation, if that's appropriate.

So the top allocation would go to Sexton's Lumber; two would be Cottle's Island Lumber; third is A.F. Hollett and Sons; fourth is B&B Forestry; and the fifth is Clear Cut Logging. So they're the largest allocation holders, they hold the vast majority of the allocation.

P. FORSEY: Okay. Yeah, if you can get me a copy of that, I'd appreciate it.

Thank you for that.

A couple more forestry questions, I guess. We've been having some problem – not problem, but, anyway, Rocky Brook Bridge in Grand Falls-Windsor, that area. I know there's been some discussion on it. There were supposed to be meetings in the new year. Was there ever a meeting had with the committee to come up with a resolution for that situation?

E. LOVELESS: Yeah. So right off the top, just to be clear, from a departmental perspective, that bridge and access to that area, there is no need for the department anymore. So I just wanted to point that out right at the beginning.

But in terms of meeting with this group, I had committed and still commit to meet with them, but we've still met with them as such. The deputy met with some of them. We did a call in December, maybe –

OFFICIAL: December.

E. LOVELESS: – around the ask for the replacement of the bridge. It is a costly venture. I have said to the group, and will continue to say to them, that you have a bridge that leads to cabins, and they're not just your low-value cabins. I mean, there are homes there as well; people are living there as well.

I will continue to have a conversation, but I have told – because sometimes you're giving an answer and the answer is not liked, but we will continue to have the conversation. If, at the end of the day, we can help, whatever that help will mean in terms of cost or whatever, for someone else to take the liability of that or the ownership of that bridge, because we, as a department, have no requirement now for that bridge to access that area.

And for clarification as well, that bridge, there is another access area. It is a longer route, you're probably familiar with it, that they can get access to that area. I know it's not ideal for them because it's a longer route. I'd like to be able to travel it just to see what state it is. We'd be willing to help there, if that's something that they wanted to do.

But I know the ask is to replace the bridge – costly. It could be upwards of over \$2 million. So we have to be responsible there as well. But certainly not ignoring it, but the answer to your question for the meeting: No, the meeting has not happened in terms of me going to Grand Falls-Windsor to sit down with the group. But I have committed to it and I'll stand by that commitment. Finding the time to do it is now the question.

P. FORSEY: Okay. The communication line is still open, basically.

E. LOVELESS: Yeah.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Forestry, we know that over the past, forest fires are increasing more and more with the climate change, dry conditions and earlier conditions and that sort of thing. Are we prepared, ground-wise, equipment-wise, air – well, you can't answer that, I guess, but are we prepared for another devastating forest fire, ground crews, especially?

E. LOVELESS: I'll lead from comments from staff as well, but I say it with confidence that we are prepared, but I don't know if anybody is prepared for the unknowns; nobody is, because we don't know the extent of fires moving forward but is it a concern. I was only watching news this morning that there are fires ongoing in Cold Lake, I believe, in British Columbia. Right now, there are concerns.

Even an outfitter was showing me some lands around the province, too, of years ago when there would be a lot of snow at this

time of the year, but there's none. That's concerning. That weighs into all of our conversation piece, but I say with confidence that we are ready, but if there's anybody in the staff –

J. CHIPPETT: I guess from an overall preparation perspective, first thing I'd say is we are set to declare the fire season open, as of May 1, for the Island of Newfoundland and May 15 for Labrador. Recruitment is ongoing. We tend to do very well with the College of the North Atlantic from their program and we've got a solid group that is always on the ground in terms of forest fire fighting.

I want to reference again the agreement we signed with the federal government, which I think is about \$32 million over four years. That will help with equipment. That will help with some of the air assets. That will help with vehicles and a lot of things that were lessons learned from the Central fires in 2022 will be addressed through that. But in terms of the numbers on the ground, I'm going to turn it to Blair.

B. ADAMS: Thank you.

As the minister and deputy have pointed out from a strategic level, we're very active in terms of preparation. I think that's true nationally in the country, given the year that most of Canada had last year. But to be specific, we have 60 COI firefighters, seasonal fire firefighters that are available and that we're bringing on, training up right now. We have a number of radio dispatch operators. We have 18 summer students we bring on and train for the fire program. We have 44 permanent staff out in the districts as well, as well as auxiliary firefighters across the department. So I feel we're well prepared in terms of ground crew and the folks that are available.

I will say that in 2023, the Island of Newfoundland had a fairly wet year and we had relatively small numbers of fires, which allowed us to put a lot of emphasis on

training and deploying our staff to other parts of Canada.

The benefit of that for us is not just training or bringing up the skill level of our staff under the Incident Command and front-line fighting system, but it also allowed us to get a lot of real world experience for them on major fires out West, which, of course, they bring back to this province and are available to deal with any issues that we have here.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Under Wildlife, we're getting some concerns from beaver trappers in the past couple of weeks. I've got a lot of emails, actually. I'm sure you do as well.

Why is the change being made for the trapper's licence on the beavers when the legislation was already there to control the beavers rather than just putting them out to anybody?

J. CHIPPETT: So I think the emails have stemmed from a meeting of the Trappers' Association where our staff were present. I know we've had a lot of challenges with people not using traplines that they've had access to over long periods of time, so that was kind of the reason for speaking to the group. You know, we're taking that feedback on board and you're right, it's not just you. We're getting some and the minister is getting some as well.

Blair, maybe, you could speak a little but more to the part of the question about being able to control nuisance wildlife and so on.

B. ADAMS: Certainly.

The reason we started that discussion, because the decision certainly wasn't made around making changes to that system, it's because of the very low level of harvest of beaver populations by trappers. There are around 600 beaver traplines in the province, but last year, for the entire province, the reported harvest was only 400 beavers.

Because of that low harvest level, the populations have been growing pretty dramatically and, of course, beavers can cause significant damage to infrastructure and property.

We're finding it difficult to control and manage the population. That's why we're considering the change to try and engage more people in trapping activities, control the population and reduce the potential property and infrastructure damage.

CHAIR: Thank you.

We're going to move on to MHA Dinn now.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In 3.1.03, Silviculture, I'm just going to jump ahead to that. I thought I'd focus on a few questions in consideration of the time.

How many hectares of land were reforested last year and how many are slated to be reforested this year?

B. ADAMS: This past year, we planted 2,015 hectares. As a general rule, we try to target around 2,500 hectares a year, if we can. That's under optimal conditions, but there are always challenges with that. Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, of course, plants on their own land as well. I don't have the actual number of hectares for Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, but I know they've planted 1.8 million trees in the past season.

J. DINN: Perfect.

I would take it then that the reforestation is done by, I guess, employees hired by the government and by Corner Brook Pulp and Paper?

B. ADAMS: That's correct.

J. DINN: Do we subsidize Corner Brook Pulp and Paper or is that out their –?

B. ADAMS: No, we're not currently subsidizing Corner Brook Pulp and Paper.

J. DINN: Perfect.

B. ADAMS: I will add as well that a large portion of the planting is done through contracts with private contracting companies as well.

J. DINN: Okay.

Are there any vacancies in this division, in Silviculture Development?

B. ADAMS: I think there are three.

J. DINN: Three out of a possible how many?

B. ADAMS: Out of 18.

J. DINN: Eighteen, thank you.

In 3.2.01, Insect Control, why was spending on Supplies under budget in this line? It went from \$193,000 down to \$65,000 and actually it didn't quite come back up. It's up around \$162,000.

E. LOVELESS: That variance was due to a less than anticipated supply expenditures associated with the 2023 spruce budworm spray program.

J. DINN: So is that a case of that the problem wasn't as bad, therefore we didn't need to spend it? I understand is it just that the problem – I'm just trying to get as to the reason why for that. We might not have spent it on Supplies, or do we have a stockpile and didn't need it?

B. ADAMS: It certainly wasn't because the spruce budworm break was reduced or less, so there was less of a need. It just so happened that we had less equipment expenses and less laboratory expenses than we anticipated. But I expect we'll have to make up for that next year.

J. DINN: Okay.

So you have to make up for that this year? How so?

B. ADAMS: No, just in terms of the activity and the surveying we had to do. We're going to do more surveying next year in terms of monitoring the outbreak.

J. DINN: Okay.

If I understand it, the decrease in Supplies, so there wasn't a monitoring – I'm just trying to get an idea when it comes to the Supplies. That's why I was asking, trying to get at the reason. If you're going to make up for it this year, I'm just trying to get an idea, is that because there were cutbacks then? Is it that you couldn't get people to do the work and therefore the Supplies weren't used? I'm just trying to get an idea as to why would it drop to, basically, almost a third, I guess.

B. ADAMS: Yeah, so with Phil, our numbers guy, providing some advice there, part of that is because with the large spray program we're running with the federal government, a number of the things we would have covered, typically under Supplies, we've now picked up under Purchased Services.

J. DINN: Oh, it would not have been – okay.

B. ADAMS: Yeah.

J. DINN: In 3.2.01, we had there a decrease in Supplies. In Purchased Services, it ran over budget significantly by \$4 million or so, but it is down to a mere \$88,000 this year. And I'm just trying to get an understanding of the variance. What happened there? Because, on one hand, we're not using Supplies, but we've got increased Purchased Services.

J. CHIPPETT: So the reason is very much planned. The reason for the \$9.9-million figure that you see there is we paid for the

ability to secure a supply a product and aircraft to do the 2024 program in the past fiscal year. So that also explains why it is \$88,300 in Purchased Services in '24-'25 Estimates because we put those contracts in place under the previous fiscal year.

J. DINN: If I may, with regard to pay for the ability to secure a supply of product, that wouldn't have anything to do with the Supplies in the Supplies line. We're not talking about the same Supplies or are they two different items?

J. CHIPPETT: No, as I understand it, the vast majority of expenditure there in Purchased Services is the product that you actually spray and then aircraft time or whatever to actually do it. You can see we've revised, through the zero-based budgeting process, some of the amounts, so it was felt that Supplies would be more adequately budgeted at \$162,100.

J. DINN: Okay. So the Supplies line then for \$65,900, would that be the products too that you use to spray? I'm just trying to make sure I'm understanding.

CHAIR: Just a reminder to make sure your light is on before you speak because, apparently, we're not getting everybody recorded, the whole conversation. So raise your hand, state your name and make sure your light is on before you speak.

Thank you.

J. DINN: Thank you.

P. IVIMEY: I think maybe some of the confusion there is that yes, what you were saying, the herbicide and the pesticide, that's not in the Supplies budget there. The Supplies budget that you see there, that's for like the routine supplies for the Insect Control Program, so like small tools and clothing, safety equipment, those kind of type of things that are needed in the day-to-day operations.

The amount that you see in the Purchased Services, that's basically the full cost of the spray program because that is a service that then is provided to us. They provide the product, the actual application, everything is built in within the whole entire Purchased Services line object for the spray program itself there.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

I might have further questions on that, but I won't do it now because I'm just trying to –

CHAIR: MHA Forsey, do you have any other questions?

J. DINN: No, I've got other questions, but not on that one.

CHAIR: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were finished.

J. DINN: In 3.2.01, Fire Suppression and Communications, is it possible to have a quick overview and update on our current fire suppression capabilities and size of the fleet and number of staff available during fire season? I think MHA Forsey alluded to some of that in the beginning, but is it possible to have an update on that?

B. ADAMS: Could you restate that question, if you don't mind, there?

J. DINN: Sure thing.

Is it possible to have a quick overview and update on our current fire suppression capabilities, the size of the fleet and the numbers of staff available during fire season?

B. ADAMS: Got you.

By size of the fleet, are you referring to the aircraft?

J. DINN: In general.

B. ADAMS: In general, okay.

As I recently outlined to MHA Forsey, we've got our ground crew available. We're well staffed there throughout our districts across the province. TI, with Air Services, is responsible for our water bombers, of course, our air tankers, which are the primary tool we use for fire suppression in Newfoundland. So there will be four tankers available for fire suppression again this year.

We've also just purchased 23 new trucks and equipped them through the federal-provincial fire agreement. So that's going to be a huge boom for our ability to respond to fires on the ground. We also have four contract helicopters available in the province that allow us to respond to fires as well.

We also are able to, through the federal fire funding, pick up quite a bit of new individual equipment for our firefighters, like Nomex fire retardant suits, fuel bowsers for trucks or supplying helicopters out in the field, and a number of other equipment. So we're well prepared.

I would also suggest that in 2023 we did the highest level of training we've done in a decade or so. Really bringing our folks up to speed in the incident command system and getting some people some more specialized training, such as fire behaviour analysis and those types of skill sets.

CHAIR: All right, MHA Dinn, your time is up.

MHA Forsey, you have further questions?

P. FORSEY: Yeah, just a couple of more questions on this section.

I'll go back to the beaver situation. So there's no decision made with regard to the trapping licence for the trappers on that one and the control of the beavers – if that's not being regulated, of how many is in the system, couldn't you control that somehow from year to year, depending on what they're sending in, how they're buying the

licences? And if they're not being used in a certain amount of time, one year or two years, shouldn't that trapping licence just be nulled?

B. ADAMS: Yeah, so the current process is that if someone doesn't trap at least five beavers a year, potentially, they could lose their trapline. So a large number of traplines have also fallen fallow. They're not being used at all, nobody has their name on them and nobody has an interest in them. As well, that's another big factor.

Near population centres, of course, you have more interest, there are more people who are interested in traplines. If someone doesn't catch their minimum amount of beaver and the traplines are removed from them, it goes to the next person on the wait-list. But often, there's not a lot of interest in even taking it over, or the next person who takes the wait-list doesn't trap beaver as well. Because the prices are so low for furs, there's really no incentive for people to do it outside of recreation and personal enjoyment.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

For moose management, when was the last time you had a survey of the moose management?

J. CHIPPETT: The Moose Management Plan that was released a couple of years ago laid out a potential schedule. There are 50 Moose Management Areas and I think the goal is normally in kind of the seven- to eight-year range to do them all. This past year, we did five different Moose Management Areas. The goal would have been for more, but weather and snow conditions were problematic from a flying perspective.

Just while I'm going, we did do, I believe, classifications or surveys of all the caribou on the Island as well.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Are those surveys done by drones and how accurate are the drones, if that's what you're using?

J. CHIPPETT: (Inaudible) drones they're done using helicopter. I guess I'll leave it to Blair to speak to the accuracy, but they're one variable that are included in moose management planning for setting big game quotas.

B. ADAMS: In terms of accuracy on the surveys, they're roughly accurate to within 10 or 15 per cent of the population.

P. FORSEY: Okay, thank you.

We're also hearing there are changes coming this year to the veterinarian service for farm animals. Are there any changes to the Health Division or 24-hour emergency service to livestock and poultry owners?

S. BALSOM: There are no changes to services provided by our large animal veterinarians. We are seeing some changes in the public providers providing some extension services for some of the hobby-type, backyard farming animals, such as chickens, as an example.

Our food animal veterinarian still will provide that service; however, there are some more options out there. I think it's based on the interest that we're seeing in backyard farming and hobby farming in the province, but we still provide a 24-7, 365-day call-out service. It is based on availability, of course and it's also triaged, if there's an incident that requires immediate attention or if it's something that can be triaged and looked at the following day during regular hours, but the service is still provided through our provincial veterinary offices across the province.

P. FORSEY: Are there any changes to the veterinary fee schedule?

S. BALSOM: There are no changes to the veterinary fee schedule, but we do have a

fee structure that does differentiate between commercial and hobby, as an example, a companion animal. We also run a pharmacy and provide pharmaceuticals and other medical materials at a cost.

P. FORSEY: Are there any vacant positions from the four regional offices?

S. BALSOM: We have two large animal veterinary vacancies in the province. One is a truly vacant position that we're currently in the process of filling. The other one is a leave of absence.

P. FORSEY: Okay, thank you.

I've got no more questions on that section, Chair.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have further questions?

J. DINN: I just want to follow up on what my colleague said with regard to the beavers. I hadn't expected to be talking about beavers, but I know there's technology out there when it talks about nuisance beavers in terms of the blockages of river flows and so on and so forth, culverts. There are very low-cost technology ways of allowing them, I guess – they do provide a value in terms of water supply and drought and so on and so forth.

They respond to moving water, but there are devices that allow them to dam but the water is maintained. It doesn't block the culverts and so on so forth. Has there been any research into using or testing of those devices that maybe other jurisdictions used that allow the beaver to do their work and also make sure that they don't cause damage to the infrastructure such as roads and so on and so forth?

B. ADAMS: They call them beaver baffles –

J. DINN: Yes.

B. ADAMS: – if you’ve heard that term before, right? That’s a fairly well-proven technology and while they are low cost, the cost adds up if you’re trying to pry them over a large piece of landscape or a lot of streams.

We do work with municipalities and cabin owners. Anyone who is really interested in it, we provide that information and encourage them to secure and use those as a long-term solution so that we don’t have to send conservation officers out to be constantly removing beavers from a water supply. We’ll encourage a municipality to put something in place.

J. DINN: Okay.

I have no issue with people trapping, with that, but at the same time, as we have a climate that’s changing and getting drier and hotter, they’ve become that a natural way of defending against it. So I know there have been some organizations here that have been using it on salmon rivers, for example.

I’m going to jump around a bit. I’m going to move ahead to 3.3.02, Cooperative Wildlife Projects. How much money here goes towards the Caribou Conservation Agreement, and is it possible to have a breakdown of how the money is spent?

B. ADAMS: We had, I believe, \$247,000 in relation to the Boreal Caribou Conservation Agreement. I don’t have the exact breakdown but that primarily, in the most recent fiscal, would have been around Indigenous Engagement and finalization of the range plan for Boreal Caribou in Southern Labrador.

J. DINN: And how are herds doing, let’s say, on the Avalon, in that area? I know they took a beating years ago with the brain worm, but how are herds doing there and in other areas as well?

B. ADAMS: So, specifically, the Avalon herd is between 350 and 400 animals the last time –

J. DINN: Wow.

B. ADAMS: – we surveyed it, which was a couple of years ago. So that’s down from a historic high of nearly 7,000 back in the 1990s –

J. DINN: Of how many?

B. ADAMS: Nearly 7,000 in the 1990s. So that herd has been stable at those low numbers for at least a decade or so, so not increasing and not decreasing.

With regard to the rest of the Island, the Island-wide population is about 31,000 on the Island of Newfoundland. As a general rule, southern Newfoundland, Middle Ridge, southern Central Newfoundland the herds are doing reasonably well.

The Northern Peninsula and parts of northeastern areas, they’ve been doing relatively poorly. In Labrador the George River Herd of course is at just around 8,000 from a historic high of 800,000. So it’s quite low, but we’ve been seeing small but consistent growth over the last three surveys, the last six years, and we’ll be surveying again this summer.

And then the Boreal Caribou herds in Southern Labrador are between 2,500 and 5,000 caribou or so. That’s a rough estimate. The Mealy Mountains herd is the only herd there that we have a recent, good estimate for and that’s about 1,300 caribou there.

J. DINN: Okay.

And on the Avalon herd, is there any reason why that’s not rebounded, why it’s neither increasing nor decreasing from where it is right now?

B. ADAMS: Most of the herds in Newfoundland have been performing poorly. The last number of years has been due to poor calf survival, which is likely driven by predation and interaction with predation and habitat.

J. DINN: Okay.

Many, many years ago, I think it was 100 Mile House, the caribou herd there, hunting was banned but the herds didn't recuperate. But their numbers were such that the replacement rate couldn't really grow beyond the predation.

I think what they did then is they sterilized the wolves so that the population, rather than killing them all, but you could maintain that balance. If I remember correctly, at the time, the herd increased. I'm just wondering here – they've been knocked down so low, right now, their normal predation is probably keeping it from growing to a healthy balance.

B. ADAMS: What you're described is known as a predator trap, where the population, kind of, gets stuck at a low level. So a number of other jurisdictions have pursued various predator control mechanisms across the country. Some are successful, some are not, but they're generally very difficult and very expensive to implement.

J. DINN: I'm assuming if you start looking at killing the predators, more predators will just move in, which is I think what will happen as opposed to –

B. ADAMS: Yes, it's very challenging.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

I think that's it.

CHAIR: All right.

Hearing no other questions, I ask the Clerk to call the subheads.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 inclusive, Forestry and Wildlife.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.3.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.3.02 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings, please.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 inclusive, Agriculture and Lands.

CHAIR: MHA Forsey.

P. FORSEY: Has the department implemented a lands management plan?

S. BALSOM: I guess, broadly, land management plans come in many forms. When we have the Land Management Division that is responsible to run the Interdepartmental Land Use Committee. So any large projects that are being planned by various departments across the government, they are looked at through the Interdepartmental Land Use Committee to look at potential conflicts and mitigations to those, prior to those projects going forward. Some then transfer to Environmental Assessment for larger analysis.

We are also engaged in some of the forest management planning processes. Environmental Assessment referrals come through the Land Management Division to look at Crown land conflicts. When there are decisions made on expanding or developing new protective water supply areas, expanding municipal planning boundaries, those types of exercises do filter through the Land Management Division.

I guess, wholistically, you could look at it as a land management plan, just from the perspective that a lens is given for those type of developments. Generally, there is no one plan that would encompass all at this point.

P. FORSEY: A review of Crown lands was done last year. Has any of that review been implemented?

E. LOVELESS: I'm surprised you're asking that question.

But yeah, we did have a response of what we heard, and I think discussions are still ongoing in the department. Even, in response to your question in the House of Assembly as well, is the work that needs to be done around Crown Lands – because I don't think, at the end of the day, even when we do bring legislation here, that it will satisfy all issues and examples around Crown lands.

So we're continuing to have that. I look forward to bringing it to the House, to this floor, and what discussions will come from that.

P. FORSEY: How many new applications are in Crown Lands right now?

J. CHIPPETT: We've got lists of the applications that are accepted each year. So, for 2023, which would be the latest, final-year data that we have, there were 2,998 applications that came through Crown Lands.

P. FORSEY: How many of those applications are under appeal?

J. CHIPPETT: I don't have that data.

Steve, I don't know if you would have it?

S. BALSOM: Out of the applications that were registered in 2023, we currently have 443 that are awaiting referral responses. So they are in that assessment process.

P. FORSEY: How many are in the courts?

S. BALSOM: I don't have that number at hand, but I can certainly get that number for you if you're interested.

P. FORSEY: Okay, fair enough. You can get that to me when you can.

Are we going to see any upcoming legislation in this sitting?

E. LOVELESS: That is my intention, my hopes. We know we're going through the budgetary process right now. I'm pushing for it, to bring it to the floor of this House as soon as I possibly can. I'm not delaying it for the sake of delaying it, believe me. I'm anxious to bring it here as well.

That's really an answer, non-answer from your perspective, I guess, but as soon as I possibly can get it to this floor.

P. FORSEY: We know that wind energy is certainly coming and a big part of that has been the aspect on Crown lands. Annual charge on land reserve will be 3.5 per cent of market value. On a new resource, how did you come up with that figure, really?

J. CHIPPETT: Our normal or existing rate for commercial leases is 7 per cent of market value. Obviously, in this instance, we are talking about reserving the land; it is not long-term tenure. It would be reserve, or parts of the reserve will be replaced by leases or licences or what have you. So this was looked at as a fair fee for a temporary legislative structure for that land.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

So it will go to 7 per cent when the reserve is turned over to a lease, is it?

J. CHIPPETT: More or less. And obviously, it is anticipated that would be less of a footprint after companies have done their final design. But whatever the geography, I guess, the geographical extent of a lease,

then 7 per cent market value would be the land charge for that.

P. FORSEY: So you think that's a reasonable percentage to accept a business, encourage business, or is it probably a deterrence to them? What would you –?

J. CHIPPETT: Just to clarify, you're talking about the reserve fee or the lease?

P. FORSEY: Let's go with lease.

J. CHIPPETT: That's been fairly standard in terms of leases. The only leases we have that are less than that are agriculture. There's a lower fee, I think, for those but generally, from a commercial development perspective, that's been the going rate.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Considering the disputes over Crown land, how are the appropriations of land management being used to simplify and expedite resolutions for residents who find themselves in a complex legal situation?

J. CHIPPETT: Repeat the question, please?

P. FORSEY: Yeah, I should. That's a hard one for me.

How is Crown Lands resolving the situations with individuals before it gets to a legal situation that they have to be fighting it in court? Is Crown Lands trying to resolve this before it gets to the courts?

E. LOVELESS: That question itself is probably an explanatory note around why sometimes individual cases can be as long as they are.

There are processes – I use an example in my own district, where a man and a woman, children grown up, the only thing they had to leave them is their property, the house and everything else. When they're going through

the process to determine ownership and there are three other people who come forward saying they own it, that can become a really, really tangly long process. In that case, they went the legal route. They just went directly to a lawyer and just dealt with it from there.

That can happen. As a department, we do everything we possibly can to help individuals with that through our means and when courts get involved, then it becomes a more lengthy process.

J. CHIPPETT: I'll just add to that.

I mean, obviously, the minister has talked about the efforts to bring forward new legislation. Part of the analysis and assessment of some of these cases, staff, at the present time, need to abide by what's in the *Lands Act* with respect to what we would all call squatters' rights.

The current rule is that you need to demonstrate you've been on that piece of land for 20 continuous years, I think, from '57 to '77. There's no doubt that, for various reasons, proving that can be a challenge. One of the things we went out and consulted on was the length of time and can you find people, for example, to swear affidavits when you're back to that period from '57 onward.

So those things that we consulted on are the things that are being talked about and pursued with respect to the legislation. We've also had instances where we've worked through a process with people. I use the example from MHA Pardy's district where people may not have met the squatters' rights claim, but we worked with them on the evaluation of the cost and came to a resolution there. I think that was helpful to them, but it was a long road.

We do our best, I guess, within the confines of the act and the regulations.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any questions?

J. DINN: Yes, Chair.

With regard to reserve and lease values, how do the percentage that we charge compare to other jurisdictions in Canada, in North America for that matter? Where do we rank?

J. CHIPPETT: I don't know where we rank on the reserve fee, because I'm not sure there are a lot of jurisdictions out there that charge reserve fees.

Steve, are you?

S. BALSOM: We did look, as a comparison, to neighbouring Atlantic provinces, although they don't hold as much Crown land as we do and they have not engaged in this process to the extent that we have; however, we felt we were very in line with the Atlantic counterparts that were involved in similar arrangements.

J. DINN: Are there other jurisdictions then across the country that charge for leasing public land for development, what we're seeing here with wind energy and so on and so forth?

S. BALSOM: I'd have to go back and get that information. There was some analysis work done to look at other jurisdictions similar to ours, with the amount of Crown land we have, such as British Columbia. But I wouldn't have that with me today.

J. DINN: So is the value we charge dependent on the amount of available Crown land? Is that what would make it more or less valuable?

S. BALSOM: Yes, that's correct, because it's based on a valuation of market value. So by looking at demand-driven areas, looking at a jurisdiction that has little Crown land, the cost of land is higher in certain areas, of course. When we look here at the

valuations for these projects, we have a lot of very remote areas that do not have a lot of land sales. We try to find valuations similar so that we have a similar comparison. So we look at some of the larger values in remote areas to try to come up with a fair valuation in this type of situation.

When they do move from the 3.5 per cent interim lease to the 7 per cent, the valuation will be done again on more localized areas specific to those projects because they are spread across the Island. So it will provide each project with its own valuation, as opposed to the current rate, which is kind of a set rate for large, remote areas.

J. DINN: I guess when I look at it, it's a resource we own and a resource that has value. I'm not opposed to wind electricity, electro-development, along those lines. I think we're going to need that renewable resource. However, I guess to the people who live in the areas where these developments go up, they might be remote to us living here in St. John's, but to a lot of people they're very much part of their own history.

So I guess in terms of if we're going to be charging for development of large megaprojects, whatever it is, I think making sure that we get the full value for the resource we're putting up – maybe it's not money, but offering it at a discount, it's still a resource that's owned by the people of the province. That's my major concern with that in terms of the value. I understand that process of determining the value, but maybe we're still undervaluing that.

J. CHIPPETT: On that, MHA Dinn, one of the goals, obviously, as these projects proceed, as I said, you would see the footprint reduced from the size of the reserves. The reserve fees, just to give you an idea of a range of values, the smallest annual reserve fee at the 3.5 per cent based on land that has been set aside for a

reserve is \$1.5 million on an annual basis. The largest one is \$13.2 million.

So some significant value there. Then, as we go to smaller ones and leases and so on, it would be a 7 per cent charge.

J. DINN: Now, the most interesting piece of information I got out of this whole exchange, which I wasn't expecting, is that the only industry that charges less for leasing is aquaculture. But I'll come back to that at another time, because that's an amazing admission which, you know, I'm sure you'll hear me follow up on.

4.1.01, Land Management: There was a study announced in 2022 by your predecessor of cabin lots along salmon rivers in Labrador. I'm just wondering what the status of that review is and what actions, if any, will be taken as a result.

J. CHIPPETT: So there's been no change with respect to the moratorium or prohibition on development. I think last Estimates, we spoke about mapping and between ourselves in surveys or GIS and mapping and DFO, we did maps that showed that there was beyond an incredible number of scheduled waterways in Labrador.

So that, I think, was a complication, but some time ago, we've started to engage with Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation and with Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation. A couple of pieces there, on the Indigenous Affairs side, it is about consultation in terms of whether some of these titles need to go to Indigenous consultation. Then, from a Tourism perspective, we were looking at engaging with them on some of their instruments around buffers, around outfitters and so on and so forth, to see if some of those things might be able to be applied.

J. DINN: I understand the number of rivers there are enormous, so that review is still in progress, I would assume?

J. CHIPPETT: Yes, that is correct.

J. DINN: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

I appreciate the fact that you're dealing with a lot more rivers.

J. CHIPPETT: Oh, it is amazing.

J. DINN: 4.2.03, Limestone Sales: Will there be any change this year to the previous practice of giving fruit and vegetable growers priority in terms of who gets to buy limestone? Will they still have a priority?

S. BALSOM: No, there will be no change in providing priority to fruit and vegetable growers with regard to the limestone sales program.

As an example, last year we received 47 applications and we approved 38 of those. So we are looking at priorities based on soil assessments, need requirements and, of course, supporting food sustainability with our farmers.

J. DINN: Perfect.

And I take it that is subsidized for fruit and vegetable farmers, if I remember correctly, in that program.

S. BALSOM: Yes, we have a flat rate of \$25 a ton. There is only one location on the Island that produces agricultural lime. So this program keeps the price at a set fee, regardless of some of the transportation challenges that may be faced depending on where your farm is located from that quarry.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

I have more questions, but I will wait.

CHAIR: MHA Forsey, do you have any other questions on this section?

P. FORSEY: A few more questions on that section, yes.

Food security: What is the percentage now of what we're bring in and what we're growing?

S. BALSOM: That's a very difficult number really to place a tracking statement on. We recognize that we hit a milestone in 2022 when we doubled the amount of Crown land that was dedicated to fruit and vegetable production. That was a milestone coming from over 500 hectares, as our base rate, over 1,200 hectares.

Since then, we've continued to invest in the enhancement of Crown land that's dedicated to agriculture production, which is clearing and enhancement. So, every year, we've been supporting farmers and new entrants on developing new land, but our strategic plan from 2023 to 2026 is focused on enhancing the agriculture growth and that's through our funding programs and our extension services and some of our strategic efforts.

I'd like to take a chance just to outline those supports, such as funding under our Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership, the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Programs, community gardens and also supporting our industry in the areas of farmers' mental health is something that we feel is important to continue to grow the industry.

We also have supports with our Vegetable Transplant Program, which provides low-cost transplants to the agriculture industry, allowing early crop rotations to grow more food across the Island. We've got a Farm Equipment Leasing Program to help new entrants and young farmers. The Limestone Subsidy Program that was just mentioned. Then we have our agriculture extension services that provide expert advice on everything from soil to crop suitability, to insects and pests. And, as was mentioned, before, we provide agriculture leases at \$4 a hectare, which is a very low lease rate.

I would also mention that we are seeing some success from the beef genetic enhancement project, where we brought in purebred heifers to over 20 farms on the Island, and our surveys are indicating that there's a growth in the beef and sheep industries.

I guess if we combine all that, we feel that the agriculture sector is growing and we are focused on assisting with the challenges that farmers are faced these days, with everything from the increased cost of production to, as I mentioned, even mental health and awareness among farmers in these difficult times.

But I don't have a flat figure to provide you to say X amount is being grown. Because that kind of changes every year from farm to farm as they rotate their crops around, as success of their crops, all those factors. In general, as we continue to support, we do see growth in the industry. I guess that's the best measure we have.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

How are these appropriations facilitating the new entry of new farmers into the industry, and supporting expansion of those existing farms?

S. BALSOM: I guess how they're assisting those farms – the second part of your question, I won't reiterate the funding and the supports and the services that were just listed, but I will say that new entrants are recognized in the programs.

New entrants, within the first five years of their being a new entrant, there's not a minimum amount of gross revenue that we require non-new entrant farmers, as an example. So new entrants are supported with equipment and land enhancement, as well as they're also supported with business development supports.

We are also, through the Federation of Agriculture here in the province, supporting

young farmers of Newfoundland and Labrador. They meet regularly and discuss and bring forward their challenges and initiatives that we here at the department try to focus on to encourage young farmers and new entrants.

P. FORSEY: In the ag leases, what are you doing to reduce wait times?

S. BALSOM: That was agriculture lease wait times?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

S. BALSOM: Agriculture leases are applied through our regular Crown land application process; however, we do have a section within the Land Management Division that focuses on agriculture leases from the perspective that we assist to ensure that the leases that they're applying for have suitable soil, to ensure that the farm land is capable and will not require an incredible amount of work. Trying to get new ag leases that are productive-ready is one of the supports that we provide outside the Crown land process.

I guess just, in general, we do give agriculture lease a separate lens when it comes to their applications. We also have identified the agricultural areas of interest across the province, where we've already gone forward through the Intergovernmental Land Use Committee process to identify and mitigate conflict so that anybody applying in those areas, there should be a reduced referral time when they go out to the agencies because we've already had a look at some of these areas.

We've also had the Land Consolidation Program where we purchase farmland from retiring farmers or farmers that are not interested. That land, where it's already farmland, is put up for a request for proposals and that is also a streamlined process.

So there are a few avenues to get agricultural land into the hands of people that are interested in either becoming a new farmer or expanding their operations.

P. FORSEY: I know we had 200 cows brought into Newfoundland a couple of years ago. How did that project prevail? Where are we on the beef end of her?

S. BALSOM: So I do have an update on that, and I'll just reiterate that the program did bring in 10 purebred heifers to over 21 farms. We did survey those farms and 70 per cent responded, so 15 farms responded. Basically, we're following 150 cows at this point of the survey; 56 per cent of those original cows were confirmed that they were still on farms in the province; 68 were on the Island of Newfoundland and we had 16 in Labrador.

From those, we've estimated, in those discussions, that approximately 180 of those would have had calves. From those 15 farms, 50 per cent of those were kept for breeding and 50 per cent, of course, went for red meat market, which is the point of the food production.

Today, we're estimating there are over 160 breeding females, up 82 since last year. So we're seeing a growth in those. Again, it will be dependent on the success of breeding. Females are kept as breeding stock. Males are grown out for red meat. So it depends on that ratio. But, overall, it continues to be a success.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any further questions on this section?

J. DINN: Yes, Chair.

It's probably too early to tell then, but are you tracking also the effect of beef production, let's say, on local food prices in supermarkets and so on and so forth?

S. BALSOM: We're not tracking the price, as you suggest. We are seeing, through our

survey, that there is more farm market sales happening locally. We're hearing from these local farming markets and local abattoirs that there is, I guess, related to the price of beef, a large demand for that market from the farmers' farm gate sales, type of thing and they're increasing.

So we feel that there is an impact overall that beef is being supplied locally. It's not incurring the transportation costs that it would bring into the province. So, generally, we feel like it is having an impact but we're not tracking the numbers.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

One time, Newfoundland had a number of pork producers. I know because I've been buying pigs from them too for roasts, but I don't think we have any – the last one I knew of was at Leamington Farms out in Point Leamington. As I understand it now, just about all pork in Newfoundland comes from Quebec.

So, with that in mind, we have a nascent sort of beef industry. Are there any plans to look at bringing back pork production as well and being self-sufficient in that way? I know several pork farmers here who we would buy from.

S. BALSOM: I guess our strategy overall is to increase the production of livestock on the Island. We are seeing more interest in beef, and we are seeing more interest in sheep. All of our programs are accessible to those industries, as well as the pork industry. However, we're not seeing the interest in pork like we are in these two other areas.

Your statement about Quebec imports is correct. The price of pork is still fairly affordable, I guess, compared to beef and lamb. The cost of production is still fairly high when you consider the feed imports for Newfoundland and Labrador. So the connection between the opportunity, the demand and the production, we're not

seeing that for pork. Would it happen if the price of pork went up? I guess that's a potential.

J. DINN: Okay.

With regard to the abattoir in Exploits, where is that right now, other than being in Exploits, that is?

S. BALSOM: Unfortunately, that facility is under receivership.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In 4.3.03, Agriculture Initiatives, how has the uptake been for the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program and does all the money get spent every year and are there plans to increase the budget?

E. LOVELESS: The full complement, \$2.2 million, gets spent every year. So there are no funds left on the books.

J. DINN: Perfect. Thank you, Minister.

Last question, 4.3.04, Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership: What types of projects are being funded through the Resilient Agriculture Landscape Program and the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Program?

S. BALSOM: There were six projects that were funded under the climate change and environmental outreach program, and they provided environmental planning services as well as funding for climate change beneficial management practices. I can provide you a list of those if you have interest in the specifics.

J. DINN: Yeah.

S. BALSOM: Under the Resilient Agriculture Landscape Program, we had 18 projects for beneficial management practices such as the incorporation of legumes in perennial forage, rotational grazing on pastureland. Overall, the

implementation of the beneficial management practices was on 315 acres across Newfoundland and Labrador in year one of the program. Again, I can provide you details on those as a list.

J. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

That's it for me.

CHAIR: All right.

MHA Forsey, do you have any other questions on this section?

Just be conscious of the time because –

P. FORSEY: No questions, Chair, I'd just like to thank the minister for his time, actually, for the meeting today. I certainly would like to thank the staff of the department, and again always appreciate the time that you give us, even outside of Estimates when we call for help or guidance along the way. I really do appreciate it. I really, really do, and just wanted to thank you for that.

Thank you.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the subheadings.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 inclusive, Agriculture and Lands.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.5.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.5.01 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the last set of subheadings, please.

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

CHAIR: 5.1.01 to 5.2.02, MHA Forsey, you have no questions?

P. FORSEY: No questions.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn?

J. DINN: Just a couple, Chair.

With regard to the employees in this unit, for both management and enforcement, would you have that and if that's an increase or decrease from last year?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: Oh, sorry.

Section 5.2.02, Enforcement: How many employees does this unit have, both for management and enforcement, and do these numbers reflect an increase or decrease since last year?

E. LOVELESS: So under the Compliance piece, we have 14 positions, and under the Enforcement, we have 93 positions.

J. DINN: Perfect.

I've already asked this but I'll emphasize it in another way, an update on the vehicles used by the Resource Enforcement Division, how many are in the fleet, how many are in operation and what is their average age? I think I asked for a comparison before for Enforcement in Forestry, at the time. But if it's here, I'd be interested to know to make sure that we know how many of the vehicles in the fleet are in actual operation, not only trucks, cars, but also snowmobiles and ATVs and their average age. Again, you don't have to provide that now, but that will be information we'll be looking at.

The last question in this section of 5.2.02: How many inspectors are there now for

monitoring aquaculture sites? That's the first question. How often are the sites inspected and do they undergo regular periodic checks or are these sites only inspected when a problem or complaint or an issue or some violation has been made known? Are they proactive or are they being responsive as well?

B. HANLON: This is actually up in the Fisheries section, but I'll answer. So there are 27 inspection staff in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Branch. Last year, there were a total of 1,283 inspections and 1,151 patrols, that includes Fisheries and Aquaculture combined, but I can break it out and get that for you.

Also, just to let you know, there were 35 environmental and biological program site visits to collect data last year, three aquatic invasive species monitoring site visits, six field work trips for the multi-species strategy and in Dr. Whelan's Aquatic Animal Health, there were 153 biosecurity audits last year and over 26,000 diagnostic tests were ran for aquaculture as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it for me, Chair.

CHAIR: All right.

Seeing no further questions, I'll ask the Clerk to call the subheadings.

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

CHAIR: 5.1.01 to 5.2.02.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 5.1.01 through 5.2.02 carried.

CLERK: Total: Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture.

CHAIR: Shall the Total carry?

CHAIR: All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: I want to thank everybody this morning for coming, especially the staff in the department.

I ask the minister now if he has closing remarks.

E. LOVELESS: One hundred per cent.

Well, that wasn't too bad at all. No, it was good discussions and feedback from that side is always important and it is not lost on us.

But I will say to MHA Dinn, that the aquaculture industry is a good industry and my invitation still stands for you to come down – and I say it with all seriousness – come down and view what’s going on down there. The supply industry is a big side of it. But I brought the *Aquaculture Act* here, which was 17 pages, up to 71 pages, so a lot of work was done around that.

Is it a perfect industry? I guess all industries have growing pains, but I believe it’s an important industry, but it is like any industry that we have a lens on it and we will continue respecting the environment and all those aspects of it. So I just want to end with that.

I thank staff again today. I felt like I needed to just leave and go home when Steve Balsom was answering all those questions, but I think it’s important though, because I can’t answer the question like they can and that’s a testament to their work and what they do, their engagement. I say thank you to them, but also thanking those that are under them that provide them with the details and stuff. So great work by the department.

Thank you all on the other side for participating. Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the workers that assist you as well. I hope everybody will have a grand day.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 29 at 9 a.m.

Now I ask for a motion to adjourn.

MHA Pardy; seconded by MHA Pike.

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

Thank you very much.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.