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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on
Resources**

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Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change

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Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change

Chair: Mark Butt, MHA

Members: Elvis Loveless, MHA
Riley Balsom, MHA
Fred Hutton, MHA
Keith Russell, MHA
Joseph Power, MHA
Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Evan Beazley (A)

Appearing:

Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change

Hon. Chris Tibbs, Minister

Valerie Snow, Deputy Minister

Tara Kelly, Assistant Deputy Minister, Environment

Dr. Susan Squires, Assistant Deputy Minister, Conservation and Climate Change

Michelle Hunt-Grouchy, Director of Communications

Jennifer Torrville, Departmental Controller

David Thomlyn, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Michael King, MHA

Bettina Ford, MHA

Jeff Dwyer, MHA

Angelica Hill, Official Opposition Caucus

Meghan Parsons, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Michael King, MHA for Burgeo - La Poile, substitutes for Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Bettina Ford, MHA for Gander, substitutes for Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jeff Dwyer, MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue, substitutes for Keith Russell, MHA for Lake Melville.

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

CHAIR (Butt): Order, please!

I call the meeting to order.

I'd like to announce the substitutions. The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island will be substituted by the Member for Burgeo - La Poile; the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune will be substituted by the Member for Gander; and the Member for Lake Melville will be substituted by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

We'll be taking a break about halfway through the proceedings, so about 7:30 we'll be taking a 10-minute break. I remind all the Members and department officials that each time you speak please wave to identify yourself, wait for the tally light to come on before you speak and say your name and your position each time for transcription purposes. Please do not make adjustments to your chairs. Watercoolers are located in the four corners of the Chamber and glasses are located on the cooler itself.

I now ask the Committee Members, substitutions and caucus employees to introduce themselves, starting with the front row closest to the Chair.

M. KING: Michael King, MHA for Burgeo - La Poile.

A. HILL: Angelica Hill, Director of Research for the Official Opposition.

B. FORD: Bettina Ford, MHA, Gander.

M. PARSONS: Meghan Parsons, Opposition Staffer.

S. O'LEARY: Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Researcher for the Third Party.

J. DWYER: Jeff Dwyer, MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue.

R. BALSOM: Riley Balsom, MHA, Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

J. POWER: Joe Power, MHA for the fine District of Labrador West.

CHAIR: I now ask the department officials to introduce themselves, starting with the minister.

C. TIBBS: Chris Tibbs, I'm the MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans and the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change.

J. TORRAVILLE: Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller.

V. SNOW: Valerie Snow, Deputy Minister.

S. SQUIRES: Susan Squires, Assistant Deputy Minister of Conservation and Climate Change.

T. KELLY: Tara Kelly, ADM for the Environment Branch.

D. THOMLYN: David Thomlyn, Executive Assistant to Minister Chris Tibbs.

M. HUNT-GROUCHY: Michelle Hunt-Grouchy, Director of Communications.

CHAIR: Before we start with the Estimates review process, the Committee will now consider the minutes of a previous meeting.

If there are no errors or omissions, I ask for a mover for those minutes.

J. DWYER: So moved.

CHAIR: The minutes are moved by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: We will now proceed to the Estimate review process. Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subheading group for this head of expenditure, I will proceed to recognize the minister who will get 15 minutes for opening remarks, then proceed to introduce the first responder/questioner from the Committee, who will get 15 minutes in the first round. After the first round, questions will proceed in rounds of 10 minutes each, alternating between Committee Members.

I'll now ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK (Beazley): For the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive carry?

I now recognize the minister for opening remarks.

C. TIBBS: Thank you, Chair.

Good evening, everyone. Let me begin by thanking each of you for being here to participate in the Estimates Committee meeting for the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change. My department's mandate supports environmental protection and enhancement through implementation of water resource and pollution prevention regulations and policies, as well as conducting environmental assessments. The department also develops strategy and programs related to climate change adaptation and mitigation and net zero carbon emissions while supporting a green transition.

I want to thank the department staff for their hard work and commitment to supporting environmental sustainability. My staff work with municipalities, residents, community groups and local leaders to help protect and manage water resources, prevent and reduce pollution, coordinate environmental assessments, advance sustained action on climate change and energy efficiency and manage the province's wilderness and ecological reserves and protected areas.

Our government understands that protecting the environment is crucial for a sustainable future. We are focusing on creating a climate change action plan that will both reduce emissions and protect communities from the impacts of climate change.

In *Budget 2026*, we are investing \$36 million into the Oil to Electric Rebate Program to support homeowners as they transition from oil to electric. We are committed to supporting communities throughout the province, to plan for climate change and build resilience to its impacts.

We are working with municipalities to identify and address vulnerabilities to storm damage, forest fires, floods, droughts and update emergency preparedness plans for dealing with the increasing number of extreme events that we've seen.

Budget 2026 will help to support climate change adaptation by allocating \$2.3 million over two fiscal years to produce flood risk maps for vulnerable communities as part of the Joint Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program with the federal government.

Through *Budget 2026*, we are providing a one-time allocation of \$100,000 to support improved community emergency response planning in rural and remote areas in partnership with the federal government.

To help create safer communities, this government is focusing on improving the delivery of safe, potable drinking water by working with local leaders and communities to develop workable, small-town solutions that match the area's needs.

In *Budget 2026*, we will invest \$3.6 million for the implementation of wastewater management initiatives including assisting the Town of St. Mary's with the disposal of organic waste from the former fish sauce manufacturing facility, environmental closure of the remaining first generation lined waste disposal sites and evaluating waste management approaches and practices.

I am very proud of the ongoing efforts of my staff and I look forward to continuing our work to assist local governments, residents and community groups. Together, this work will make Newfoundland and Labrador a stronger, more resilient province for all of us.

I just want to take a quick moment and recognize the staff that I have here today. It's not the complete staff, of course, that work with ECC, but I'm so proud of each and every one of them. It's a very humbling experience to be surrounded by such good, competent people who work extremely hard. Like I say, I'm extremely proud of them.

To the Member for Burgeo - La Poile, I listened to you speak today in the House,

and as much as there may have been some discussion and some, not necessarily agreeing on everything with the NMCA, I have to tell you first of all, I admire your district and the people who are down there and I admire your passion for your own district.

What we see as further climate controls moving forward for any NMCA, and I'm looking forward to working with the groups on the South Coast, to develop another strategy moving forward that works for you, but I have to tell you, you spoke passionately today and I really, truly do admire the stance that you have on conservation. I applaud you for that today; you spoke very well.

Thank you very much and we look forward to questions moving forward. I don't know if this is your guys first Estimates or no.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

C. TIBBS: No. Okay.

I've enjoyed this process over the past six or seven years, as long as we were in Opposition. I found that myself and Ms. O'Leary were here on Tuesday morning and it was a great discussion. I learned a lot and I think that everybody else learned a little bit too.

We are extremely accessible at all times and if anybody has any suggestions or any plans within the province or within their district, please come forward and talk to us. We're there to listen.

I'll hand it over for questions and I thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: I now call on the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the minister for his introductory remarks there and I certainly

appreciate his comments on the House of Assembly as well. I know he knows that that issue, specifically, he mentioned is at the top of mind for me and the constituents of my district. I look forward to having some more dialogue on it tonight in Estimates. Just have a respectful conversation, absolutely, on that matter and many matters involving Environment, Conservation and Climate Change.

I do want to also thank your staff that are here with us this evening. I know the important work that they do in the department. As someone who worked in a different department before, I appreciate the work that the public service does for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and I think this department is certainly becoming more important as we move to the future in this province.

As you touched on, a little bit, experience, rural areas especially, I think, probably wouldn't have mentioned climate change and environment as much in the past but due to the experiences we're seeing with wildfires and especially in my area with Hurricane Fiona, it's very top of mind now for a lot of folks. That's something that's very important to them and they want to see their government supporting initiatives and things to make sure that we can address those issues and concerns. I want to thank you for your introductory remarks and we'll move right into questions,

The first question I have is, would you be able to table the Estimates binder that you have with you this evening?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

M. KING: Perfect, thank you.

Minister, as of March 31, 2026, how many staff are employed in Environment, Conservation and Climate Change and can you let us know if those employees are permanent, temporary or contractual?

C. TIBBS: We have a total staff complement of 131 staff. Filled positions, we have 114 filled and we have 17 vacant – sorry, we have 80 permanent, 55 that are temporary and five contracts.

M. KING: You said 17 vacancies?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

M. KING: And where would those vacancies – look at the divisions, where would they lie in divisions?

C. TIBBS: Valerie can take this one.

V. SNOW: Of the 17 vacant funded, eight of those are seasonal workers who work in, for example, Mistaken Point. They are only employed during the summer season in areas that are of ecological importance in the province.

So of the 17, there are actually 11 who are with Policy, Planning and Natural Areas; there are two in Pollution Prevention; one in Water Resources Management; one with the Water Quality agreement; and one in Environmental Assessment.

M. KING: Thank you very much.

Minister, under Salaries in the Minister's Office, 1.1.01, which employees would that include? I know it would include yourself, obviously, but who else would that include?

C. TIBBS: It would be myself, my secretaries and my EA.

M. KING: Okay.

I know you, obviously, represent two departments, with Municipal Affairs. Do you have one political staffer for both departments?

C. TIBBS: No.

When you have an EA that good, I only need one for two departments.

M. KING: Okay, that's good. A good vote of confidence for the EA in the back, that's good to hear.

Under the Salaries, I'll just elaborate a little bit on that, there was a dip last year under the revised. Could you just explain that variance there, please?

C. TIBBS: Which variance? Could you give me —?

M. KING: Under Salaries you'll see the revised dropped a little bit, and then it's dropped again this year in the Estimates from the budgeted amount.

C. TIBBS: Yes.

This decrease reflected a lower salary expense for new minister and executive assistant. The expense is split with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs as well.

M. KING: Thank you.

Under the same section, Transportation and Communications, there was a drop in the revised from last year. I know the budgeted amount is the same, but could you explain the difference in the drop in that?

C. TIBBS: Sure.

That would be a decrease that reflects the lower ministerial travel expenses.

M. KING: Perfect, thank you.

We'll stick to Transportation for a bit. Minister, I know there are a lot of conferences and events that happen under this department. What are your plans for this year ahead? Are you attending any conferences? What's the plan from your department?

C. TIBBS: I wouldn't be doing a whole lot of travel with this department as you might see with some other departments, like Energy

and Mines and whatnot, but we do travel. I think we are travelling from the 14th to the 16th of July to Calgary.

What is that conference?

OFFICIAL: That's the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

C. TIBBS: Yes, that's the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

We'll meet with some federal counterparts, but our provincial counterparts across the country here and then I'll also have a meeting up there with my Atlantic counterparts for a specific Atlantic meeting there for the Atlantic provinces.

M. KING: Perfect, thank you.

That Transportation and Communications cost, would that include your political staff, as well, your EA if he was to travel with you?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

M. KING: Okay, thank you.

Minister, if I may, just because it's under this subhead and I might divulge a little but from line to line if that's okay with you, I just want to ask a couple of different questions because I know it might not be directly with environment but, as Municipal Affairs Minister, it may kind of go under you as well. So if you give me a bit of leeway.

Waste management, specifically, that would more or less fall under Municipal Affairs, I think, correct?

C. TIBBS: Waste management would fall under Municipal Affairs and our Regional Service Boards as well. So there's a huge Waste Management Division that we have in Municipal Affairs that takes care of waste management.

M. KING: If I may just ask a question about that because you are minister for both, which is timely, and I had some of those questions, not realizing, I guess, the difference. I think from a waste management perspective, a strategy hasn't been revised or developed since 2002, I believe. Do you have a plan for that going forward to look at that strategy to develop a new one? What is your plan on that matter?

C. TIBBS: Great question. I know many people across Newfoundland and Labrador have the same inquiry.

We are doing a full review of the Regional Service Boards across the province and how we can use them more efficiently and more effectively. Over the next year, that's a report that we're going to have. That's something that we're going to dive into and waste management will be included in that as well for many rural areas.

M. KING: I certainly appreciate that because I know, as you imagine, there are a lot of issues and concerns around waste management and especially on, like, tipping fees. I know tipping fees is a big concern for a number of communities on the West Coast.

Could you elaborate on where you stand on tipping fees? How do you see addressing some of those concerns? And this is why I'm asking a lot in this section, obviously, giving you the chance and I know it's not really in a different subhead. The cost to a lot of communities is exorbitant for dealing with waste management.

I mean, you're seeing small communities like Ramea, an isolated community, very small tax base and not increasing. Those costs are going up and up and the tax base is not growing. They're starting to struggle with how they're going to deal with it and trying to find a plan. Could you just elaborate on that a little bit and what you look at and see for a tipping fees perspective?

C. TIBBS: Sure.

We understand fully the financial pressures that are on rural communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Both departments are here, always, to work, support and work with the communities, as well as their community leaders but make no mistake, waste management, there is a cost to it. We want to make sure that this is done right, the due diligence is done when it comes to waste management.

Through our reviews, if there's a more effective or efficient way to present the taxpayer with a little bit of relief, then we'll get there.

But like I say, there is a dollar amount on it when it comes to tipping fees. We want to try to keep as much out of the landfills as we possibly can. So through this department, we may come up with different ways of recycling, reusing.

I'm also in charge of the MMSB and I work extremely close with the MMSB, so any different innovative ideas that we can come up with to keep more stuff out of the landfill, at the end of the day, that may help with some tipping fees, but we're going to review all this.

As I say, the tipping fees are what they are right now because there is a cost to landfill waste. If I can lower that cost by getting less garbage into a landfill, I'll pull the trigger on that.

M. KING: I think that's why I'm kind of asking these questions as well because the Municipal side and the Environment side do kind of go together really well when you look at it. A lot of these issues are facing small communities but are also important to the environment and our local landfills and making sure everything is cleaned up and stuff.

So MMSB, I'm assuming that would be under Municipal and Community Affairs or would it be under this department?

C. TIBBS: No, that would be under this department.

M. KING: Okay, and that would be in a different section, I'm assuming. So I'll probably save those questions when we get to that. Perfect.

I'll move on to 1.2.01. In 2025, the budgeted amount for Salaries was \$729,400, the revised amount increased to \$917,900 and now it's at \$877,100.

Can you explain the differences there, please?

C. TIBBS: Which variance is this?

M. KING: Oh, I'm sorry, Salaries under 1.2.01. It increased in the revised from the budgeted last year and it's increased from the budgeted last year as well.

C. TIBBS: Yeah, so that increase reflects the salary expenses for required positions. The budget reflects unfunded executive positions: an assistant deputy minister, for instance, a director of communications and a media relations manager.

M. KING: Thank you.

Under Grants and Subsidies, there was a budgeted amount of \$13,600 for '25-'26. There was nothing spent according to the revised amount and there's no budget for this year. So can you explain the lack of spending and why there's no allocation in that line item please, Minister?

C. TIBBS: That decrease reflects a zero-based budgeted adjustment to reprofile the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment membership expense to Purchased Services, that's just the membership that we have to pay.

M. KING: Okay, so when it was budgeted, you changed where it was spent, basically.

Okay, perfect. Thank you.

The provincial revenue is expected to be \$192,000. What is the source of this revenue?

C. TIBBS: That increase reflects a higher salary recovery for the MMSB CEO due to salary increase and an additional pay period in 2025.

M. KING: So that revenue is for salaries, you said?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

M. KING: Thank you, Minister.

C. TIBBS: It's a recovery of salary.

M. KING: Would MMSB fall under this subhead then or would it be in a different subhead?

C. TIBBS: It would be in a different one, but where we're talking about revenue here now, that would be, I guess, revenue for the department itself, but I think MMSB would –

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

C. TIBBS: Sorry, MMSB is not included in this Estimate. If you have any questions. They're self-funded. They fall under the department. I'm the minister responsible for them but they are self-funded.

M. KING: Obviously, that's why the salaries are there, included. Okay.

I guess I will get into questions on MMSB in this section while I have a little bit of time.

Have you met with the MMSB, the CEO, the leadership there and what kind of conversations are you having on the future going forward? I know during the MNL conference in Corner Brook that we both

attended, they had a great presentation on things going in the landfill that really shouldn't be there, more extensive than I actually expected to be honest, what the CEO was highlighting.

Can you just elaborate, have you met with them yet and what kind of conversations are you having for the future of MMSB here in the province?

C. TIBBS: Sure.

I've met with the MMSB four or five times now, I guess, myself and the department but myself with the department have met with the MMSB about four or five times now. We have an extremely close relationship with the MMSB as you can imagine. Those conversations have come up about different ways of recycling, reusing. Yeah, we've had several conversations.

We enjoy our work with the MMSB. We realize how important they are to the province and we'll continue those conversations moving forward.

M. KING: Perfect. Thank you, Minister.

That will be all for me, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

Great to meet your support team. Thanks for all the work that you do.

Full disclosure, environment, conservation, climate change, they're my game, I've been in it for a long time. That's the reason why I got involved in politics and long preceding that as well. I've been either a friend or a foe to many people, some of your predecessors in the department because I was a strong advocate for the provincial cosmetic pesticide ban, as well as, in

conjunction with MNL, the single-use plastic bag ban.

These were single issues that made a difference certainly on the larger scale and, of course, it was from a vantage point as a municipal leader that I was doing it. Lots of people telling me, oh, I'm not staying in my lane, but do you know what? That doesn't matter. You know when you need to get things done, that you have to push forward.

C. TIBBS: From what I know about you, you'll make your own lane.

S. O'LEARY: Exactly.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely.

S. O'LEARY: You've got it, exactly.

Anyway, this is an area that I'm very interested in and I am interested in seeing improvements and collaborations and holding to account. All of those things will, I'm sure, unfold over time but I'm very, very excited about the potential.

I will start, I guess, with just some general questions. My colleague here already started with some in regard to the department, so my first question would be: Could we have an update on the work of the Net Zero Advisory Council? How many recommendations have they made and how many were acted upon?

C. TIBBS: Not a problem at all, yes.

I'll defer this one to my deputy minister, Valerie.

V. SNOW: The Net Zero Advisory Council was established with a three-year mandate that ended in December 2024. They produced a report with, I'm thinking, 54 recommendations, which is publicly available on the website.

They did a tremendous job over their three-year mandate providing recommendations

on the major sector areas you would look at when you're looking at areas to achieve greenhouse gas reductions. It was a very valuable tool for having advice given to the minister during their time.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful. I look forward to seeing that report as well. I'm here to learn, so that's great. Thank you for that.

My next question is in the general sense, I guess, feeding off my colleague here.

Sorry, I don't have a proper hearing device here just yet so I'm asking people to speak up.

C. TIBBS: (Inaudible.)

S. O'LEARY: No, no, with hearing aids.

C. TIBBS: Oh, sorry. Okay.

S. O'LEARY: But in any case, if I ask you to repeat or just speak up, you'll know, because right now I'm kind of dealing with a lot of things.

I certainly have been a member of the Eastern Regional Service Board from the City of St. John's and, of course, had a strong working relationship with the MMSB as well, as a result of that experience, so I come with a little bit of intel there.

One of the things that I certainly would love to reference – the NDP, of course, climate change and environment are big issues – we oftentimes think about just recycling and things like that when it comes to it, but the golden rule is really reduce, reuse, recycle and in amongst all of that is something that isn't illiterate, it's composting.

One the things that we have seen is that the organic matter, which causes methane gas, has been going into the landfills and our regular garbage for a long time. In my experience, MMSB has been supporting some grassroots organizations along the way, but, really, I think, could take a much

stronger lead in terms of being very proactive in these areas. My colleague and leader, Jim Dinn, of course, today tabled a Member's statement on a wonderful business that has started up, NewfoundSAND Glass Recycling, which I think merits a real strong look-in. I would certainly task you, Minister, and your department.

It is a co-operative model, which, of course, is another thing that I strongly support, but everybody for years and years have been saying, why are we throwing away our glass? Why are we doing it? It is something that could be reused. It could be made into something that could be financially beneficial. It could create jobs. It would reduce the waste that goes into the landfill.

So I ask you about that specific question right there, are you willing to go in and really have a good, strong conversation with that particular co-op as well as other players who have innovative businesses that really could change the landscape of some of our landfills?

C. TIBBS: Sure. Appreciate the question.

As I said in the opening remarks, we are extremely accessible to anybody who wants to come and meet with us, especially if they have an idea that's going to make sense to us in the future. Yes, we did meet with that glass company and we are funding a pilot for the glass.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

C. TIBBS: When it comes up to any ideas whatsoever about, like I say, reuse, reduce, recycle sort of thing, we're all open ears for this sort of thing.

I've tasked my department with coming up with new ideas including the MMSB, especially for glass, because that's one of the things that we should have been recycling a long time ago in my opinion. We just need to find a good way of doing it

that's going to work financially, that's going to work for the province specifically, and how to get people to actually clean out your stuff, get the glass going. We need to find ways of incentivizing people, in my opinion, to do the right thing. We did it with cans, we did it with plastic bottles and now we're tasked with finding a way to do glass as well.

I applaud anybody who comes up with new innovative ideas to once again reuse, reduce, recycle, and, like I say, we'll sit down and chat with anybody.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Well that's positive because that's kind of a long overdue initiative.

In my opinion, that's really long overdue. The repurposing of glass, as we know, is something that really could be used in so many different materials. Because part of our province is surrounded by ocean completely and the shipping charges of getting those kinds of materials off is off the charts and only continues to contribute to our carbon offset, I think it's really important that we look at those kind of initiatives.

Thank you. I appreciate that.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, let's see. What else have we got here.

I just want to reference, as well, the full review of the regional service boards. I would just ask the question around that because I was party to a lot of the conversations previously about the role of the Eastern Regional Service Board and what kind of role they take with the government, not really going down the road of regional governance, as many through MNL have seen lobbied for some time. There was a lot of discussion about whether or not these service boards could play that kind of role.

It has been some time now since I've been in the municipal sector, so I would just ask you about where we are with those kinds of conversations?

C. TIBBS: Sure. Again, that's part of MCA, but that's okay.

The regional service boards, like I say, supply services throughout the province. There are five different boards, I believe, that are active right now, but we're trying to find new ways to make them more efficient, to see if there is anything. Some of these boards are pretty broad; I think there are 22 or 23 members on one of those boards, so we're trying to find a way to make sure that these boards are as efficiently used as we possibly can throughout the province. That may be taking on new initiatives for the boards themselves, but, make no mistake, that's what we're trying to do now, just to see what they've done since their inception and how we can use them more efficiently moving forward.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

That's it for me, in terms of general questions at this stage of the game and for this section.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: Thank you.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

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

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Environment.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive carry?

I now call on the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Minister, under Pollution Prevention, Professional Services was budgeted at over \$2 million in 2025-2026. The revised amount was \$360,000. What is the reason for the decrease in 2025-2026 and why has the allocation jumped back up to \$555,000 for 2026-27?

C. TIBBS: Thank you for the question.

That's to clean up some military sites. We had some funding from the federal government to clean up some military sites up in Labrador, I believe, and it didn't come to fruition. That was years ago, so we need to revisit it now and, if we're going to do that, that money is going to be much more, obviously, that we're going to need after so many years as everything has increased over the past while. Those were the military sites. I can give you a full rundown, actually, for the Member.

In 2017, the province committed provincial funding of \$2 million per year for remediation for a five-year period beginning 2018-19 contingent on receiving \$2 million annually in reimbursement from the federal government for a total project cost of \$20 million. In order to advance this project, an agreement with the Department of National

Defence is needed. Due to the extensive preparatory work required, delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and requirements to consult with Indigenous groups and organizations and other stakeholders, an agreement has not yet been secured.

As a result, the precommitted funds have been deferred, most recently through the '25-'26 budgetary process. ECCC originally budgeted \$4 million in 2025-2026 for mediation work at the former military sites, however, until a formal cost-sharing agreement is in place, no remediation work can be done. We're still waiting on an agreement with the federal government.

B. FORD: Minister, did you say those consultations had to take place before the agreement would be reached?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

B. FORD: Thanks.

Carrying on here, under Grants and Subsidies, they go from \$2 million in *Budget 2025* to \$150,000 in the revised Estimate and then rise again to \$3.6 million as an Estimate. What programs were delayed or cancelled in 2025-2026 and what is being restored in '26-'27?

C. TIBBS: That would be for St. Mary's. We haven't allocated all of the money yet, and that's why it's carried into '26.

B. FORD: Why didn't it go ahead this year? Why didn't it proceed if the funding was there?

C. TIBBS: The St. Mary's?

B. FORD: Yes.

C. TIBBS: The work isn't done yet.

I can refer to Tara for –

T. KELLY: What happened with that was we had \$2 million funded last year for provincial waste management; you'll see right there in line 10. We couldn't spend the funding. We were going through the tender package and the various pieces of the contract and that kind of thing and looking through the waste management plan and then the winter came on and we couldn't do work in the winter.

The \$1.6 million had to be transferred over, or carried over to the next year. We have \$2 million this year, plus the money for the St. Mary's fish sauce plant. You'll see there's \$3.6 million under this year's budget and the \$150,000, that's in the revised, that's money that we paid out to the consultant to develop all the paperwork and the contract and the waste management plan.

We paid out \$150,000 of what we were planning, which was the \$2 million, and then the rest of it we had to carry over towards this year.

B. FORD: So you've received that waste management plan?

T. KELLY: Yes, we've received it. It has been approved. It's moving ahead. Everything is going ahead. It will be done now this spring.

B. FORD: Okay, thanks.

Minister, federal revenue was budgeted at \$2,025,000 for 2025-26. The revised amount was \$25,000 for 2026-27. The amount is back up to just over \$2 million. What accounts for the decrease in revenue last year and what changes are expected to boost revenue for 2026-27?

C. TIBBS: Great question.

I'll divert to Valerie Snow for some more information.

V. SNOW: That is related, again, to the remediation of the military sites. We had

money allocated in the provincial budget for that, which didn't move forward in the absence of an agreement. The \$2 million that's there, originally forecast last year, was matching funds from the federal government to also advance that initiative.

That money wasn't spent and we wouldn't estimate that it would be spent next year either because we're not anticipating having the agreement in place.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Minister, what is the department's current enforcement posture on illegal dumping, industrial emissions and petroleum storage compliance, and how many enforcement actions were taken in 2025-26 compared to previous years?

C. TIBBS: Illegal dumping, of course, is a huge problem within our province. It's a terrible problem that we've been trying to get a handle on for years. As you can appreciate, it's extremely tough to try to regulate because people are pretty shady; they can get into some areas where nobody knows.

Right now, I know that, for an individual, the fine would be anywhere between \$500 and \$10,000. I would personally, as minister, like to see that fine increased as a deterrent for people, no different than being irresponsible with a fire, for instance. I know that when we had the fires last summer, those increases went through the roof, sort of thing, in hopes that it would be a deterrent, and that's something that we're going to look at as well.

I didn't catch the second part of your question.

B. FORD: The second part, it also spoke to industrial emissions and petroleum storage compliance and how many enforcement actions were taken in 2025-26 compared to previous years. Maybe if you wanted to focus on illegal dumping, how many

enforcement actions were taken in '25-'26 compared to previous years?

C. TIBBS: I'm going to divert to Tara for that.

T. KELLY: One thing I just wanted to point out was that our enforcement arm is through Government Services.

B. FORD: Okay.

T. KELLY: So what happens normally if there is a report of either illegal dumping of any kind of a spill or anything like that, Government Services environmental protection officers would respond to that and they would also investigate and lay any charges or anything like that.

I don't have the numbers for that here, personally, right at the moment. I do know that, for example, under throwing litter out on the highway, under their legislation, they have four. They issued four offences, I guess, last year.

They do keep track of that, but as far as industrial compliance and that kind of thing, again, if there were any major spills or emissions or releases of contaminants into the environment, it would be them who would investigate it.

B. FORD: Okay.

I think I'll move on. Partially in your role, as well as Minister of Municipal Affairs, there's a bit of a crossover here, I think. What percentage of municipal wastewater systems remain non-compliant with federal effluent regulations? What is the department's plan to support compliance?

C. TIBBS: Yes, you're right. Supporting compliance is extremely important, obviously, and I can pass that over to Valerie Snow for some further comment.

V. SNOW: Sure.

That has been a challenge. Meeting the federal standards has been a challenge for smaller communities. I think we have been doing a lot of training and working with communities to try and help them to get up to that standard and also working with them to have transitional authorizations, which gives them the ability to work outside of those regulations in the meantime.

I think, Tara, you might have the stats and numbers on how many communities.

T. KELLY: There are 753 wastewater outfalls that are owned and operated by 211 communities in the province. Not all of these would fall under these wastewater regulations.

The regulations were amended by the federal government in 2024 and, since then, there has been a lot of work done by communities – 61 have received their transitional authorizations, which has been a really good thing. It allows them to move the work out in a number of years so they can continue to work towards getting their systems upgraded.

There are 55 communities that are either working through the process or have yet to apply for it.

B. FORD: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

I'll just take up where some of the questions have left off there regarding the military site cleanups. I am just wondering if you could itemize what locations that we're talking about, primarily.

C. TIBBS: I'll divert to Tara, again. She has a list of the sites.

T. KELLY: There are eight sites. I'm going to have to go by memory on that one. I

know Makkovik, Hopedale – I'm trying to remember. They were the North Coast of Labrador. I don't have all the sites but I could get them for you. I didn't bring the list.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, that would be wonderful.

Are they all situated in Labrador?

T. KELLY: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: They are?

T. KELLY: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: I ask that questions because I know that the federal government had an American base in St. John's on the White Hills, which I had a hand in trying to expose and trying to elevate its remediation. It was a crosshairs between the federal, the city and the provincial government.

I am just wondering what you do in those scenarios when those happen in the province, how you go about tackling something that could be a leftover – obviously, you've got ones in Labrador. I am sure that there may be other sites as well that need to be remediated. I'm just curious about the process or how you go about doing that.

T. KELLY: Do you want to know specifically about the military sites, what the history has been?

S. O'LEARY: Yes, the military sites in particular. Thank you.

T. KELLY: So the military sites have been there – it's a long-standing issue. Back in 1986, there was an agreement between the province and the federal government, at which time the federal government paid \$5.5 million for us to take on the military sites, which is nothing in today's terms. The province has spent \$18 million since then trying to clean up the sites.

The minister said a few years back there was sort of a notional agreement that the feds would go in on a cleanup, up to half, of \$23.7 million. Since then, the estimation is out of date. We've done additional work with the Indigenous groups in the area and discovered additional issues that they want to bring forward and would like cleaned up as well.

So about a year ago, we wrote the federal government and asked if they would consider increasing their portions and they said, at that time, that they would have to go back to the Treasury Board and they needed a new estimates.

So as the minister said, we've taken out the amount that we were going to spend to do the remediation work but we've left in \$500,000 to be able to hire a consultant to do new estimates for that particular piece of work. So we're hoping that we will be able to go with new estimates and negotiate a better agreement with the federal government.

We've done a bit of work in this past year, not exactly on remediation, but we've done additional environmental site work at Border Beacon and Northwest Point, those are two of the sites.

Susan has all the sites here listed up now. They are Harbour Lake, Wild Boar, Border Beacon, Hunt Lake, Hopedale, Cape Makkovik, Cape Harrison, Cut Throat Island, Cartwright, Spotted Island and Northwest Point. So there are some, kind of, remote areas that maybe are not well-known.

This past year there has been some monitoring at the Hopedale biopile also done, it's not remediation work, but it's monitoring and assessment work.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

Again, just another follow-up on the illegal dumping issue. So I understand it's across

departments. Government Services is who actually tasks the clean up. Again, with some experience in this realm of having reported illegal dumping sites, in particular on the Cape Shore, I didn't get a very favourable response. Honestly, I got some signs and that was pretty much where it went.

So I'd ask you, Minister, in that situation, how are we going to proceed forward to help remediate some of these grandfathered sites, that if we don't task and get rid of them, of course, they continue to be a problem in communities or in natural areas?

C. TIBBS: It's extremely important and I think that the public needs to remain vigilant, if anything else. There's a role for, like I say, the public to step up and report these sites as they see them, as they grow. They're all across the Island, again more in rural areas, but there are, of course, some here in the city as well.

That's something that is an issue across the province, but people need to stay vigilant, report it to the government, Government Services, of course, will follow up, as well, it will get reported to our department, I'm sure.

But you're right, we need better access to – I know there have been cameras set up in certain areas. I know that there are some pilot projects set up to try to catch some of this illegal dumping over the years, but 530,000 people in such a broad area, there are so many places to do it.

S. O'LEARY: Yes, it's a lot.

C. TIBBS: My main focus would be to tell the public to stay vigilant. If you see it, report it, and we will deal with it at that time.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Thank you.

The MMSB has noted that it is facing challenges due to rising costs and aging infrastructure. Have there been any plans in

the last year with government to address these, either through new funding or other initiatives?

C. TIBBS: Yes, that's something that we're continuously looking at and working with stakeholders and communities to do.

I don't if Valerie had anything to add about that?

V. SNOW: MMSB has been having some issues, I think, with their office space and other infrastructure. They have been looking for solutions to that.

They are getting to a point where their success – they have a business model where if the return rate of their bottle program, which is their most successful program, goes above 70 per cent, they actually begin operating at a loss because they are operating based on the deposits that are in. I think they see that happening.

They have a contingency fund that they can draw down on for that. If they do find themselves in a situation where more money is needed to support their operations, they write to the minister and request to draw down on that fund.

That has happened over the last couple of years, but a longer-term solution to how funding is stabilized for the MMSB, should return rates remain high, is another question that I'm sure the MMSB is looking at and will be speaking to the minister about.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Regarding the fish plant in St. Mary's, what concrete actions have been taken to clear the mess since entering office? Is there any resolution to this problem in sight?

C. TIBBS: Absolutely.

I'm in constant contact with the mayor of St. Mary's and we've met with the council out there. I've been out there; my staff have

been out there. The first thing we did was, we paid to make sure that the building was structurally sound and safe, first and foremost. They had a crew come in and ensure the safety of that structure itself. Very, very quickly here the tender will be going out to remove the fish sauce itself. We had a couple of places in mind to bring the fish sauce. I think we have one nailed down now.

Like I tell the people of St. Mary's, before the summer is out, hopefully you won't be smelling fish sauce anymore. I mean, this is something that's been going on now for over 20 years, from my knowledge. It's something that the people of St. Mary's had to put up with for quite some time. We are extremely proud to get out there and get that remediated. Like I say, I'm sure that will be done over the summer here.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Thank you.

There's a case in Fortune Head where a closed landfill site was included in an ecological reserve. The cover of the landfill is being eroded and letting garbage spill out. There was an engineering report done by government on the matter back in April 2025. Has the department decided on a plan of action from that report to fix the problem? Certainly, we've been approached on this issue multiple times.

C. TIBBS: Yes, of course. We hear from the people out that way as well.

We realize that it's not good for the province, it's not good for the area and it's not a good look overall. It's something that, once again, has been happening for the better part of two decades, from what I understand. There are some plans there that are going to take some money, a short-term plan and then a longer term plan. Throughout the department, we're going to come up with a plan that's economically feasible as well as meets the demand out there to get this done. It's something that needs to be addressed here at some point.

It's a discussion that we're having within the department currently to see what the best plan of action would be that would help Fortune Head out.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Thank you.

I do have another couple of questions but I think I'm almost out of time – I can continue?

CHAIR: Yes, sure.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

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

C. TIBBS: I'll divert once again to Tara, but through our environmental assessments a lot of this would be mitigated.

I'll pass over to Tara. She would have much more knowledge.

T. KELLY: My understanding is that was an occupational health and safety study. It was not actually a study done by this department or contracted by this department.

There has been a bit of confusion over the years over that. Our department does monitor ambient air quality and industrial emissions and that kind of thing from the particular site, but we don't monitor indoor air quality.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I will say, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi kind of stole my question there last. I was hoping to get a pat on the back

from my colleague, the Member for Labrador West, for asking that.

Just to elaborate on it a little bit, you said the indoor, but this is an outside. Is there any monitoring at all? How is that? Can you just elaborate on that a bit.

V. SNOW: We do air quality monitoring. We do industrial air monitoring at various sites. We do Tacora, IOCC, Voisey's Bay and that kind of thing, so we do outside monitoring and we do look at parameters such as sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxide, PM_{2.1}, which is fine particulate matter. That's the kind of stuff that dust would probably fall under.

There are ongoing discussions with the company. There has been various measures that they try to take to tamp down the dust such as watering the roads and this kind of thing. The study that was talked about, I think it was related to silica dust over a number of years ago, but our staff do actually monitor the site as far as industrial air emissions and that kind of thing.

M. KING: Perfect. Thank you for that.

Minister, I just want to get clarity on the Grants and Subsidies again. Did you say, out of the \$3.6 million that's estimated, \$2 million of that is for St. Mary's? Did I hear that correctly or did I hear that wrong? Is the full amount for St. Mary's?

C. TIBBS: I'll divert to Valerie.

V. SNOW: Would you mind repeating the question? Is it the \$2 million in Pollution Prevention?

M. KING: Under Grants and Subsidies, under Pollution Prevention, the \$3.6 million estimated amount, could you elaborate on that a little bit more because I wasn't clear on the St. Mary's part of it? I know that the money is there for that but can you elaborate if it's all for that, or, if it's not all for that, what else is that money being used for?

V. SNOW: Well, at that time we didn't have a firm number for the St. Mary's removal. This \$2 million was meant to capture a rough estimate of what the St. Mary's removal may cost, along with money for supporting the Provincial Solid Waste Management Strategy, which basically means closing landfills that are no longer in use. That was something that we had done over a number of years and it always had money in the budget for that.

We didn't have any of those closures in that budget year. It's largely demand-driven; a community or a landfill owner has to approach the government with the desire to close one and then we will help provide the funding and do the necessary studies. It was supposed to be that the \$2 million would cover St. Mary's and any of those other sort of more typical business-type closures that we do year to year.

M. KING: Thanks for that.

Is that money allotted just to remove the fish sauce or is that to deal with the building as well?

V. SNOW: That is just the removal of the material, the sauce.

M. KING: Okay. Is there any funding for the building as well or are you guys just dealing with the fish sauce?

V. SNOW: We are in discussions with other departments for covering the other pieces of it, but the funding that we have available in our department is more related to the material itself. We don't have, say, the expertise in the department to evaluate whether or not a proposal to remove a building is – we don't have that type of expertise. We are working with other departments to see how the full project could be completed but the \$1.3 million we're talking about in here is just the material removal and disposal.

M. KING: Thank you for that, Deputy Minister.

I kind of just want to elaborate on that one a little bit, because it touches my district specifically, in the sense of abandoned fish plants.

I think there is an environmental aspect to that of course. I mean, a lot of these places are just left there to turn into rubble. They're right on the water, and a lot of it is going into the ocean sometimes. It's a serious concern for a lot of communities, I think of two in my district specifically off the top of my head, Burnt Islands and Rose Blanche. Two different situations as well because I know the situation for those in Rose Blanche, it's privately owned. The owner is taking no responsibility of it. The municipality has been trying to deal with it for years. It's a legal nightmare. It's right next to where you take the ferry to get to La Poile. I believe there is some health and safety aspect to that as well.

Burnt Islands, you know, the plant went bankrupt. The building is still there. Fiona was a big disruption to that. There was debris all over the place. It's a big task to ask municipalities to take that on. I mean, the cost is exorbitant. I know you had mentioned there are conversations with other department but is there, Minister, probably from your perspective, a plan to look at dealing with these plants?

I know there are a number of them across the province. What are your thoughts on dealing with these plants and working together with the department? There's actually no real policy to deal with that, so just want to get your thoughts on that a little bit, please.

C. TIBBS: We realize how much of an eyesore they can be within communities. It just looks like pure rubble, like you just said, next to the waterfront there. It's something that needs to be dealt with, so we'll continue

to work with communities and work with TI and any other department.

If there's a specific one that you want dealt with in your community sort of thing, bring it forward to government, and we'll see if we can come up with a plan moving forward to get rid of it. I know the main point is to get rid of this fish sauce first and then we'll deal with the remediation afterwards, but we'll work with the communities to try to come up with a plan to make it work.

M. KING: No, I certainly appreciate that, Minister.

I know, especially in the case of St. Mary's as well, my colleague from Placentia - St. Mary's has been inundated with this issue for a number of years. I know that she would appreciate to see the whole thing gone as well, so we appreciate your commitment to looking into that.

I just want to kind of touch on coastal pollution as well. I think back to Hurricane Fiona again, you know ghost gear especially we hear about a lot, a lot of pollution going into the water. I know there are a couple of companies out there that came to help with taking some of that out of the ocean, but it seems like they were kind of on their own from a funding perspective, and I don't think there is really anything here to support businesses like that – just to get your perspective on how to deal with that issue, please.

C. TIBBS: Yes, and I guess Fortune Head would fall into that as well.

I'll direct it to Valerie. I don't know if you have any thoughts on moving forward or what has been done.

V. SNOW: You're right, there have been ghost gear cleanups before, and it is a problem off the coast. We don't have a provincial program in place right now. The federal government is talking about relaunching something like this.

I'm not sure if, Susan, you have more details on that perhaps, but they are planning to expand on that in recognition of the ocean pollution that it causes.

If you're talking about sort of pollution on the coast in general as well, if you're talking about beach cleanups and that sort of thing, we have had through the MMSB issued a community cleanup fund every couple of years. We didn't have one last year; we have the year before, where communities can apply for funding to do cleanups around the community. That would include things like that. It doesn't have to be on the coast; it can also be in communities. That may be something could be directed to do again, just to help smaller communities tidy up areas that they have around.

Susan, did you have anything to share on the federal part?

S. SQUIRES: (Inaudible.)

V. SNOW: (Inaudible) but that's about all we know for now is that the program is coming on the ghost gear, but it would be particularly useful in the province.

M. KING: I certainly agree with you there, and I'm glad to hear because I know, obviously, the provincial department and federal department work very well together. I'm glad to hear some kind of program is coming and to hear that support.

A question on cleanups, especially in and around here on the Avalon, in previous years we've seen cleanups happen on the TCH leading up to White Hills, will the department continue with this?

C. TIBBS: Yes.

M. KING: Perfect. That was an easy answer, Minister. I love those yes and no ones.

What is the department's plan to modernize pollution prevention regulations, particularly

around industrial air emissions, hazardous waste and pesticide use?

C. TIBBS: Tara, did you want to speak to that?

Could you repeat the question, Michael?

M. KING: What is the department's plan to modernize pollution prevention regulations, particularly around industrial air emissions, hazardous waste and pesticide use?

T. KELLY: I'm just wondering is there any particular piece that's causing issues that needs to be modernized?

M. KING: Probably mostly around hazardous waste. Can you elaborate on that section a little bit?

T. KELLY: On municipal hazardous waste or household level hazardous waste, recently the minister directed MMSB to investigate an EPR program, which is an extended producer responsibility program for municipal and household waste, so that would be helpful in that perspective.

For industrial waste, hazardous waste, we follow the polluter pays model. In the sense that if a company is producing it, then they are also responsible for finding out a way to dispose of it. So, really, that's the model that we would follow there.

Same thing with contamination in general. What happens is under the legislation, the person responsible is named, and the person responsible is the person who has released it or who is now owning the property. There is a process outlined in the legislation to follow then, and there are a number of steps. I can read them to you – if I find them.

Essentially what it is, is that once you're named the person responsible, you're required to hire an environmental site professional. The environmental site professional then would go in and do an

investigation, a sight assessment, of the area and the property and how far the contamination has spread or describe what's there. They would also put forward remediation strategies or mechanisms to contain whatever the substance is, and then the responsibility would be to then have it cleaned up.

At the end of the process, they would come back with a report of what is done, what has happened. Then we get a site closure letter. It would either be from us or from Government Services. There are different tiered sites. Depending on the tier, one, two or three, go to one department or the other. I think we probably deal with the higher level one and Government Services would give out closure letters for the lower level.

It goes between two departments and it's a bit of an iterative process when it gets into the site professional producing the report and then our staff reviewing it and providing feedback and that kind of thing. Eventually, the outcome is meant to be a closure letter and it's all built around polluter pays, so it's the person who owns, who is responsible for it, that has to clean it up.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes Minister Tibbs.

C. TIBBS: I'm just going to add to that. We just met with Scotia Recycling maybe three weeks ago as well. They came down and we had a great meeting with them. When it comes to, like you say, producer pays, and that's a model we're going to be looking at moving forward. We're going to try to implement it more and more because there should be an accountability, or as Ms. O'Leary knows probably all too well, there should be an accountability there on those that are producing.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

This is a great discussion, by the way. Really great information sharing. Thank you so much for bringing forward all of this information that we can chew on.

My question would be, are there any plans in the works to launch pilots or commissioned studies into the processing of organic waste to divert from landfills? Do you have any cost estimates for doing so at Robin Hood Bay in particular?

C. TIBBS: So that's something that we're constantly looking into the amendments before, as well, for a partnership. They come up with different grants and different subsidies throughout the year and we come to them with ideas and we bounce ideas back and forth sort of thing.

That's definitely something that's been discussed and will continue to talk about. Make no mistake, we need to keep more out of our landfills and do the same.

S. O'LEARY: It's been, honestly, a very frustratingly slow process for us to task the organic waste component in our landfills. Just as much as I'm going to be an irritant to you, I was an irritant at the City of St. John's in the same capacity.

C. TIBBS: You're absolutely right and the more we keep out of the landfill it's going to be economically the best for us.

S. O'LEARY: It's methane gas. It's something that is impacting our Climate Action Plan that will be coming and understanding that it's extremely important for the environment.

I think it's not enough to lean on those smaller little, mom-and-pop kind of organizations that are really doing great work. I have a friend, Viviana, who has a

fantastic compost project that she envisions but it's grassroots level and the government has an opportunity to really show some leadership in this realm.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely, with both my departments, if I may, it kind of crosses over. We're going to be working with municipalities to go on a much bigger level when it comes to organic material as well. That's something that I've tasked my other department with, to find out if we can work with the municipalities and what kind of level of commitment they want to go in with, because if you can make it a community thing as well, I think that it's going to go a long way.

S. O'LEARY: Yes, absolutely, thank you.

Chair, following up on that, as St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and my former municipal experience, certainly the city landfill, that's a big issue that impacts the whole North East Avalon. It's where all the garbage and refuse end up from a variety of many communities. Of course, that's going to get timed out.

Aside from the timing out, we certainly hear – and it's not my specific district, but I hear it all the time, as does MHA Davis as well, because it is in his district – about the smell from the landfill in the City of St. John's. It's been going on for many, many years. Again, remediation and mitigation of organic waste is a huge component of that.

I do know that they burn, they use some of that organic material to actually run the recycling facility; however, we need to see a stronger evolution. It's an impact on the communities because of the smell, but it's also really bad for all of us in general.

I just want to put that out there, and with a deadline date of the city landfill to be expired – I understand the date moved a little bit, I'm not sure, Minister, if you know exactly what that date is but I understand it

might be 2040. I'm not sure if anybody has any intel on that.

C. TIBBS: No, I'm not sure but it's something that my next meeting with Mayor Breen and council I can definitely bring up. I've met with the mayor now several times, on several occasions, but it's definitely an issue. I can only imagine, like you talked about, the smell and stuff for people within the area.

Again, at the end of the day, it will come back to reuse, recycle. If we can take more out of the landfills, it's going to slow down that process, it's going to make things better. Of course, the glass recycling, it will all contribute. Over this four-year mandate, sooner than not, these are what we're going to be looking to tackle.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

My final comment at this venture – no, I still have a few more, sorry. My apologies.

C. TIBBS: Take your time.

S. O'LEARY: I keep on adding to the list here, which I'm sure –

C. TIBBS: It's good questions, Ms. O'Leary. Take your time.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

I've watched the evolution of the city since 2009, where it really was not very proactive in terms of environmental stewardship, evolve into an organization that is receiving awards for its climate action. Of course, they declared a climate emergency in November of 2019. They've also really put some time and energy into a sustainability officer. I have to commend them, it's all, of course, advocacy and community advocacy that has gotten it to where it is, but there are some real results happening in many ways.

I would certainly urge you, Minister, because the reality is, we all learn from

each other and there's no greater or lesser. Some people are doing better in certain areas than others. I know that the city certainly relies on the provincial government funding, as well as optimizing a number of federal programming opportunities and funding opportunities to actually elevate that.

I am looking forward to hearing more from you in terms of your conversations with both Mayor Breen and staff going forward because they have been making advancements and I think that there's an opportunity to do that here with the provincial government as well.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely, North America's oldest city and it's the most beautiful city, as far as I'm concerned. You spoke very passionately today with your petition about the Signal Hill area, especially.

Listen, it's a culture shift. We need a culture shift when it comes to this, you know, you get your communities on board. But we'll continue to work with the City of St. John's to get the best results that they can and keep as much out of the landfills as we possibly can and come up with a robust plan moving forward for, if it is 2040, what's beyond 2040?

S. O'LEARY: Right.

C. TIBBS: That's something, like you say, Ms. O'Leary, we need to get a handle on today, sooner than later. So we'll continue those conversations and we'll work with Mayor Breen.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful, thank you.

We had an extremely dry year, obviously in 2025, and many parts of the province have faced unprecedented droughts. Towns like Torbay have faced challenges keeping their water systems functional.

How is the department planning for the challenges that a more volatile climate puts on basic services like water supply?

C. TIBBS: I'll let Tara talk about this for a little bit when it comes to water resources. I know it's something that was one of the big things that I dove into as minister. Obviously, safe water supply across this province is an issue but it's something everybody should be entitled to, but where the department is moving, I'll hand over to Tara for a couple of comments.

T. KELLY: Drought this year was a big shock to a lot of us, even though perhaps it should not have been with climate change. Our department has been involved in research trying to figure out the state of how bad the drought was this past year. We initiated a drought vulnerability study for the province. There's a survey that's been developed and sent around to gather information about the risk, the impacts, the resilience of various sectors, industry sectors and stakeholders like municipalities.

We're doing other work. Both Susan and I, her from the adaptation side and me from the water resources side, had a discussion with Emergency Services on bringing this issue forward. It might be something that could go in municipal emergency plans, as well, because once the water is gone from the source, it's certainly an issue both from the firefighting perspective and also from the drinking water.

Our staff has done the jurisdictional scan. We've looked at what's happening in other areas. Some areas have volunteer brigades that provide emergency water in times of drought. We've been thinking about a mobile water treatment plant, whether that would be a potential, whether municipalities could assist in providing a station for water where people can come and fill up. Those are some of the things.

We're hoping to get more done in this vein. We don't actually oversee private wells, but

we realize that there's about 15 per cent of the population that use them so it's important to provide information. We're trying to update, I guess, scale up and understand the phenomenon that's happening and then to be able to provide information to users.

I guess that's a little bite of what we're doing in that regard.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I just wanted to ask further about the drought vulnerability study that was just referenced. When will that one be made public?

C. TIBBS: Tara.

T. KELLY: It's only just gone out. We haven't got the answers back even. We only just sent it out about a week ago. We haven't had a chance to compile it, but, certainly, when it comes back in – I'm not sure what the timeline is, to be honest, right at the moment – it would certainly be available once we have something compiled.

B. FORD: Okay. Was there a deadline for responses to that?

T. KELLY: I feel like it was maybe a month. We sent it out to a number of industries, like agriculture, municipalities and this kind of thing, to try to explain how their impacts have been and give us some information. That will be a great starting point then to try to figure out which areas need to be targeted, I suppose, for more information or solutions.

B. FORD: Sorry, if I missed it in your first response, you said about a month, so when was that survey distributed?

T. KELLY: I think it was a week or possibly two ago.

C. TIBBS: Yes, within the past two weeks.

B. FORD: Okay, thanks. Thanks, Minister.

Minister, what new flood risk mapping, hydrometric monitoring or climate-resilient infrastructure planning is under way in response to the 2025 flood events?

C. TIBBS: The communities that are planned for '26-'27 are the Burin Peninsula, Grand Bank, Lamaline, Marystown, Point au Gaul, Rushoon and St. Lawrence, and '27-'28 is not finalized just yet but the options include CBS, Appleton and Glenwood.

We know how important it is, obviously, because I know Badger floods every single year. The more that we can map the flood risk, it's going to be huge for these communities. It's going to give us a sense of where we can build and where we cannot build, if we need to put up seawalls or different infrastructures, power lines. It's going to help us that way through.

B. FORD: Thank you.

The communities that you just listed, is that specifically flood risk mapping that will be done there? Will any of those include climate-resilient infrastructure planning?

C. TIBBS: That will be flood risk mapping.

B. FORD: Okay.

C. TIBBS: Sorry, Valerie can have a couple of comments on that to elaborate.

V. SNOW: Thank you. It's a really good question.

These studies will be flood risk mapping, and they then feed into exactly what you're talking about with the resilient infrastructure planning. Being able to determine where there is a flood risk, it's a tool that municipal

planners can use. It doesn't identify exactly how to integrate the infrastructure but it's a basis for that further planning.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Minister, I'd just like to go back for a moment on the municipal wastewater systems that are non-compliant with the federal Effluent Regulations.

I appreciate the responses given when I previously asked about the number of communities, so I just wanted to clarify, when we talk about the 211 towns, are Local Service Districts included in that number now when your department says towns? Would it be 211 incorporated municipalities plus Local Service Districts?

C. TIBBS: One moment, I'm just going to take a look. I'm sure Tara might have that information down there.

B. FORD: Thanks.

T. KELLY: I don't have a breakdown. I think it's both. I can clarify that, find it out and pass it on to the minister to make sure, but I believe it's any system that's owned and operated, which is more likely than not going to be municipality. Perhaps it might include the other ones as well, but I will find that out for you and give it to the minister to pass it back.

B. FORD: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

I ask because I know, Minister, we've had some engagement about a community in my district, Benton.

C. TIBBS: Yes.

B. FORD: I know we're in the process of setting up a meeting there. They're dealing with effluent issues.

So I wanted to ask, in the previous question and response about the supports that are being provided, can you maybe just give me

a little bit more information about specifically what kind of supports are being offered, say, to a community like Benton who knows they have this effluent system to deal with?

C. TIBBS: I will divert to Tara again, but as to do with Benton, like I say, they have been in contact with our Water Resources Management team. We look forward to meeting with the Benton as well. They have a beautiful horse stable out there, actually, but, yes, I'm looking forward to that.

Maybe Tara could elaborate a little bit more on what we're going to do moving forward.

T. KELLY: We don't provide funding generally, from this department. We do provide funding for five regional water and wastewater operators that are stationed in the regional service boards. They are located around the province, the regional service boards, and they help to provide training.

We also have a number of training opportunities through the department. We have hands-on training where we have mobile units that go around to the different towns and communities and show people how to use the water systems and the wastewater systems. We also have classroom training, and we have online training.

With regard to the wastewater federal regulations, we've also recently developed, in partnership with Environment Canada – and MNL as well helped out with this – a new training course that's going to be online. MNL is going to, I think, put it up on their website as well, and the idea is that we really want to show people how they can do things at a local level and how they can fix their systems themselves rather than, you know, having to employ a consultant.

We've heard, especially with the wastewater regulations, that there is a huge markup, I guess, when you have to involve somebody from outside, so it's very important to try to

get local people trained and we've done a lot of work in that area.

With regard to Benton in particular, I know there was a letter sent out in November with some information for the community. Also, we've had staff who have gone out on a couple of occasions to try to work with the community members as well. We're certainly willing to do more of that. That's their bread and butter, I would say of the Water Resources Management Division.

B. FORD: Thanks for that, Chair.

I guess I'm going to move us forward. I mean, we're talking about water management anyway, and one of my questions was specifically around that, Minister, around supports for volunteers in small communities. I've done a lot of volunteer roles in my life, but having to put chlorine into a water system for my fellow residents, I don't know that I'd want that responsibility. So that training, I know it's valued and appreciated by people out there on the ground doing that work.

Minister, what is the department's plan to address the chronic boil water advisories, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities?

C. TIBBS: As of May 4, 2026 – that was three days ago – there are 193 boil water advisories in place; there are about 148 communities affected by these boil water advisories, serving a population of about 51,540 people. The affected population is about 11.6 per cent of the population serviced by the public water supplies.

I do know also that this department has worked with MNL to disseminate training materials across Newfoundland and Labrador as well, but, yes, we're very, very proud of the people that we train for water regulations. I met with quite a few of them out in Gander a few weeks ago and we're going to continue to do so.

B. FORD: Okay, thank you.

Speaking on the boil water advisories, this just came up in a conversation I had with a rural municipality. Their question was, from their Local Service District, has the department ever considered literally digging and providing artesian wells for every household in the community as opposed to a very costly undertaking for providing water through underground and digging up the road and the pavement and all of that. Is that even anything that's been considered or costed as an option?

C. TIBBS: I'll divert to Tara again in just one second, or Valerie, whoever wants to take this on. But I also know that there's a huge cost with digging a well and putting in a pump and stuff like that as well. So I don't know if there's ever been a study to see where it's offset. I mean, I get your point, and if it could be offset or if there could be a feasibility study done, it would be a great idea. I grew up on an artesian well. It is the greatest water imaginable.

I don't know if it's something that we've done before, and I can maybe let Valerie or Tara – Tara down at the end there can speak a little bit more to this.

T. KELLY: So when it comes to drinking water safety, we take a source-to-tap approach. We start right back from looking at protecting the water supply, the watershed area, and then all along the stages of getting it to your drinking water.

With the boil water advisories, that focuses on public drinking water supplies that are in the ground, like you've mentioned, that have pipes and that kind of thing. But there are other ways that you can get water too. We've had a long-standing program to have potable water dispensing units. There are a number of these around the province. They were very successful. I mean, it's not the same as you turn on your tap, but you can go down the street and fill up your water.

So that is often a more reasonable solution, less expensive, and it ensures drinking water for people. That wouldn't change the needle at all on boil water advisories, but people would have safe drinking water. Similarly, there is equipment that can be put on people's houses, either at the house, sort of the juncture between the pipe and the house, to be a filter, or there are tap filters that can be put on as well. That's something that our Water Resources director has been advocating for.

We had a project about a year ago to develop a matrix to try to kind of figure out what would be the most feasible solution for a particular community to look at, because it's no good to put a lot of infrastructure in the ground for a community that can't afford it and that is not going to be able to keep it up. So there are other solutions.

That's one thing I've always advocated is that the boil water advisories just kind of looks at one piece of it. It looks at the public water supply system, but like you said, there's a number of different things that you could be doing to ensure potable water to people. So we're trying to look at some of these other solutions and make these well known and acceptable to people. Acceptable in the sense that people understand how they need to use them and that they can still get safe drinking water this way.

B. FORD: Thank you and thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Since we're at the halfway point, it's time to stop for a break. We'll stop and take a 10-minute break and we'll reconvene at 7:40 p.m.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I'll start asking a couple of questions under 2.2.02, Water Quality Agreement. I think I'll just elaborate a little bit on the boil water advisories that we were just talking about. I guess not only drinking water but the quality of the water used to bathe and wash your dishes in, all that stuff is very important. I can tell you from Burnt Islands, especially, I'll talk about my own community. I always think back to when my nephews first came home from Alberta and my mom filled up the bathtub for them to have a bath. My nephew was like I am not getting in that. He's like the water was brown. He's like no, what is going on here.

Talking about the quality of the water outside of drinking, even washing white clothes, it's not possible. You ruin it as soon as you put it in the washer for the first time.

Can you elaborate a bit on that, not only from the boil water advisory, the drinking side, but also on the quality for the water you use for other things?

C. TIBBS: Sure, it's not just a rural issue. I know in Grand Falls-Windsor, and with the aging infrastructure we have in some of these bigger communities, it's an issue there as well. There are some places in Grand Falls-Windsor that you wash your clothes, it's ruined. They've come to adapt one way or another. Tara talked a little while ago about some filters that can be done to stuff like that.

There are some smaller towns that have been putting up with this for quite some time now. The department will continue to look for solutions for all of these issues, but, right now, like I say, we'll continue to work with the communities to see if we can come up with different ideas moving forward for them.

Again, the aging infrastructure, especially in the bigger places like Grand Falls-Windsor, that's not helping this issue at all. It just seems like the infrastructure is all aging at the same time across the province,

unfortunately. We have a huge deficit within the province.

So we're going to dig deep into each department, including TI, to see what we can come up with to mitigate some of these issues; not just drinking water, like you say, it's bathing, it's washing your clothes. We're going to continue to do that.

M. KING: Thank you for that, Minister. I really appreciate that.

What is the department's strategy for protecting source water areas from forestry, mining and development pressures?

C. TIBBS: I'll send it over to Valerie in a moment here.

Could you repeat the question once more? Sorry.

M. KING: What is the department's strategy for protecting source water areas from forestry, mining and development pressures?

C. TIBBS: We have robust reviews within the department to mitigate any projects that would have to move forward. Of course, they have to go through an entire process before they move ahead with any of these projects which you've been talking about.

I can probably pass it over to Valerie to explain a little bit more about what this department does to mitigate these issues.

V. SNOW: As the minister mentioned, there are always stipulations for development in and around water for new projects coming on line that require an environmental assessment. There are also very strict rules about what can be done and what can't be developed near a protected public water supply. You need an exemption permit to work near one of those.

Tara may have some more information on the protected water supply regulations, but,

generally, work and development is prohibited inside one unless you're granted an exemption and that's a completely separate process, with the goal of protecting municipal and public water supplies.

T. KELLY: I just wanted to add that our staff has been reviewing the protected public water supply areas and we update them from time to time. We refine the data, the GIS layers and that kind of thing to make sure that the mapping is correct and it encompasses the watershed area.

So that's a process that's constantly ongoing to make sure that the area is corrected and reflective of modern technology and science and understanding of the ecosystem.

M. KING: Thank you very much for that. I appreciate your responses here.

I'm just going to move into 2.3.01, Environmental Assessment and Sustainable Development, and talk about a couple of questions and then I'll probably come back to this section. I'm just looking at my time.

I will start with, obviously, we're talking a lot about industry growth in different sectors, the mining, the energy and aquaculture sectors. So how is your department preparing for that increase when it comes to environmental assessment reviews?

C. TIBBS: I can pass over to Valerie in a second to get a little bit more in depth about it. But we have our target set for 2030 for all projects coming online and all the existing projects as well.

I can pass it over to Valerie for further comment about where these new projects are going.

Make no mistake, all these projects will have to pass a rigorous EA assessment, environmental-wise, as they go through government. These assessments are taken extremely seriously. They're very

prescriptive and we want to make sure that we protect the province to the best of our abilities.

I can pass it over to Valerie for some more comment.

V. SNOW: Thanks.

I think it was three years ago now we did increase the staff complement in the Environmental Assessment Division in recognition that there was going to be large projects coming online in the coming years. We have done capacity building with the staff that we have, as well, to learn about different sorts of projects that we'd be having to evaluate that maybe we haven't evaluated before.

For example, green hydrogen projects, which we are looking at several of those now, to try and facilitate the process for proponents coming in who want to register for an environmental assessment. Our team offers a pre-review of their documentation to see if it's in line, if there are gaps, prior to registration so when it comes in it's in a more comprehensive document that could be assessed in a more efficient manner.

We just signed a draft agreement with the federal government on projects that require a federal and provincial EA to streamline that process and allow the federal government to defer, where possible, the provincial process, which is about two years, versus the federal process which is about three to five years.

We are certainly looking at ways to make the EA process more efficient both for ourselves and the use of staff time, and for people who are coming in to register their projects.

M. KING: I appreciate that, because, as the minister would know, during my time in the former Energy department, IET, we spoke with a lot of industry and a lot of different companies. I mean, this was a key aspect

and an important aspect to their projects. Trying to make that as efficient as possible to make sure we're addressing those environmental concerns while at the same time helping them proceed with their projects is certainly important.

Just on the environmental assessment side and the review side, do you get much uptake in the commentary back when you post those out?

C. TIBBS: I mean, it depends on the project of course, the area that it's in and the uptake that's in the project, itself, but we do get quite a bit of commentary back.

For smaller projects we might see very little to no commentary, but when it gets opened up for review for the public, we enjoy reading whatever comments come back. It sort of directs which way the environmental assessment is going to go, to see what needs to be mitigated by those proponents that may be raising the issues that they may have.

At the end of the day, it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we answer to within the communities. It doesn't matter how big the project is.

M. KING: How would the public be notified of those? What's the normal process for that?

C. TIBBS: I'll pass over to Valerie.

V. SNOW: When a project comes in, it comes in and is registered. We post that on our website, that it has been registered, and we put the timeline for public consultation. Also, it's the minister's decision when that's due. We provide a link to all the documents that are associated with the registration.

We also include it in the weekly Environmental Assessment Bulletin that goes out to all media. Basically anybody can sign up to receive the bulletin weekly as well. We also feature it on our social media

if it's a bigger project and a bigger decision has just been made, but it is as they come in and are registered, they are posted on the website and we do a push notification through our EA Bulletin weekly.

M. KING: While I have a bit of time here, I think of rural communities especially, and I guess this is kind of two part: Is mailing in your commentary still an option? Do you work with municipalities at all to notify the public? Just elaborate on that one a little bit, if don't mind.

Thank you.

V. SNOW: To your first question, yes, you can still mail in comments.

Say, on a sort of standard registration – if there is just a registration document that's posted online – we just disseminate it through that means, online and through the email. For larger projects – the one that's coming to mind is World Energy, because they came in with a very large document that was their registration and their environmental impact statement, and, as a requirement of our legislation, then to make physical copies of that available to the communities in the area. It goes to libraries or town halls. When it's a bigger project with a lot of community interest, the materials are disseminated out into the community.

Did you have something, Tara, to add? Maybe that was it.

T. KELLY: I was just going to add to that it wasn't much with the smaller project, but with the bigger projects, generally, in the guidelines for the EIS or for the EPR, there is a public consultation requirement and that's a piece of it. The proponent has to show that they've engaged with the communities and that they've taken the feedback into consideration.

M. KING: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of questions left in this particular area. What happens when a resident's well water tests positive for naturally occurring arsenic or uranium? What does the department do to mitigate that, and who ends up paying?

C. TIBBS: Perfect. I'm going to pass that one to Tara for comment as well.

T. KELLY: Like I said, our focus is on public water supply areas.

We do offer as much assistance as we can on the private water. If there is a well test that comes back, we would provide some of the technical advice, not to the extent that a consultant would or a private contractor. We could point them in the direction. It would be up to the homeowner to source that and to then do the remediation of their well.

S. O'LEARY: Okay. Thank you for that.

Under 2.3.01, Environmental Assessment and Sustainable Development, could we have an update on the environmental assessment processes for the offshore wind projects?

C. TIBBS: Sure. I'll pass this over to Valerie for an update on the offshore wind.

V. SNOW: Are you talking about the green hydrogen? They are onshore projects; those ones?

S. O'LEARY: The offshore was what I was –

C. TIBBS: I believe the process for offshore.

S. O'LEARY: Yes, the process for offshore.

V. SNOW: Oh, sorry.

That's a federal process. We do the environmental assessment of the onshore ones, sorry, but the offshore ones, we're not engaged in that process.

S. O'LEARY: Well, thank you for that clarification. I appreciate that.

This will be my final question in this particular section and, again, it's a general one. I've had the great experience of seeing the benefits of organizations, like Stewardship Association of Municipalities, who do phenomenal work in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; because, as was referenced earlier, wetlands are the sources of water that obviously impact our water sources, our rivers that end up in the ocean but obviously become our water supply as well.

I'm just wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the wetlands studies or how the province deals with it. I know the City of St. John's – again, I'm sorry to keep reflecting upon my municipal experience, but that was a very long and laborious process, obviously in conjunction with the province, to go through a complete investigation and a wetland study and delineation – because of development issues, it was imperative that the city identify all of the really important and significant wetland areas, so that we could protect them, but also in respect to developers so that we wouldn't end up in these liability issues and the back and forth every time a development proposal came through.

There's such great merit in understanding those sources. I'm just wondering how the government deals with that? This is an education for me in terms of the higher level.

C. TIBBS: Sure. I'll defer it once again here, but I've had several conversations and meetings with my federal counterpart, Minister Dabrusin.

Conservation, like I say, which would include wetlands, we've both agreed to come up with a conservation plan for the province – which Mr. King will be quite happy to hear about as well – incoming over this mandate. We're going to be looking to include the South Coast as well, of course, at some point.

I can ask Tara to take –

T. KELLY: We do have permitting for activity in wetlands and we've had a number of studies done on that, but I can't tell you the technical pieces, like how it's delineated or anything like that. I'd have to find out that information for you but there is a permitting regime that, again, like Valerie explained for the watershed development, wetlands could be a part of that.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, that's fine for me. Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

As the minister mentioned earlier, we had some questions on this today, so he probably is not surprised that I will be asking some questions on the marine conservation area. That Memorandum of Understanding was very important to the communities in my district. I know that he knows that because he did meet with the towns after their announcement.

Off the top, I do have some specific questions. I just want to give you an opportunity to talk about, as an overview of that MOU and the work that was being done in the department with the other signatories, what work was done before the decision to drop the MOU and, basically, how did you come to that decision. What facts did you use? What process do you use, consultation? Just a high-level general question on that first.

C. TIBBS: Sure.

As you know, it was at the start of our mandate and the reasoning for the decision was the support just wasn't there. We didn't see the support there from enough people that wanted it to go ahead at the time.

Speaking, again, with my federal counterpart, we're going to have open, robust discussions about future conservation areas moving forward. I mean, I would even go as far as to say that some people within your own caucus didn't want it at the time. We won't name any names right now, but the support just wasn't there on the scale that we needed it to go ahead with as it was presented to us at the time.

That's not to say that more conservation areas aren't going to come forward and we're not going to have a robust conversation. One thing that I can guarantee you is that, moving forward now, I'm going to be heavily involved with the communities, including the representatives, whether it be yourself or any person within the House of Assembly, moving forward so we can have that conversation. It is something that we looked at.

Again, it didn't seem like there was enough support there to go ahead with it, but we'll learn from what decisions we made moving forward. I truly look forward to more conservation areas within this province. We want to make sure that, again – and I know we talked about this before that there aren't any jobs or industries that will be affected by this.

I know that you care about the jobs in your area. If somebody came out a magic wand and said, MHA King, this is going to affect your district heavily when it comes to jobs. We're going to start laying off people. It may shut down some projects, then you may not have been in favour before. I know your point being why not give it a chance first to get through the feasibility study and whatnot?

Again, at the time, we didn't see, as a government, the support there that we needed. We heard more people against the decision to go ahead with this in NMCA than we did supporting it at the time. I've had many conversations with Mayor Green and the council down there. They're fantastic, and we get where they're coming from. Between the two departments, we have made the commitment, moving forward, to explore other options, especially when it comes to tourism, when it comes to their infrastructure down there and what it would take to ensure the success and viability of the South Coast, which is absolutely beautiful.

We're going to look for more conservation areas in the future, we'll continue to work with our federal counterparts with that and I look forward to those conversation as well.

M. KING: I do appreciate that, Minister. I will say, I know that my colleague does support my district as well, and I think he definitely supported seeing the feasibility study through to see what it would look like.

I know you're saying that you heard from a lot of people who didn't agree with it, but what form did that come in? I know this was in place, obviously, before you took over office in October –

C. TIBBS: Certainly.

M. KING: – but was there written material? Were there phone calls? How did you justify and quantify that there were more against it than there were more for it?

C. TIBBS: There were phone calls – many phone calls.

Before we took government, and just as an MHA, obviously, leading up to it, we had conversations with our federal MPs that would be around the province as well. They definitely put their two cents in. Like I say, just the conversations that we've had with

people, mayors through different towns within the area.

Again, the support just didn't seem to be there enough to pull the trigger on it. If it's something that we're going to continue to look forward to moving forward, we want to see more conservation areas in the province, it has to work for the province – it has to.

Just like you, MHA King, we're not looking to put anybody out of work. We want to make sure that the next time that conservation area does come up for discussion, that needs to be in the discussion and it needs to be at the forefront. That's one of the things that needs to be at the forefront. We know how stable we are economically here in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are a lot of people who have had some hard times, but we need projects here. We need industries here. It's what makes Newfoundland and Labrador go and it's what puts people to work.

I mean, I worked in the oil and gas sector for over 20 years. I know how devastating it is when somebody loses a job. So it is a balance that we need to find. I think that we have the right people here that will find it moving forward. It's something that I'm looking forward to, finding that balance. The fact that they put a driller off an oil rig in Environment, it's not ironic; it's exactly the way it should be, because I can see both worlds and I'm sure, with the help of my department, we'll find a way of balancing this in the future.

M. KING: Thank you for that, Minister. I know that you know I'm asking these questions respectfully, obviously.

C. TIBBS: You give her, buddy.

M. KING: But this is part of the process.

C. TIBBS: Absolutely, yeah.

M. KING: But back to the feedback part. I mean, we know there were certain groups out there and certain MPs. I obviously was paying attention as it's affected by district significantly. I do believe that there was a lot of misinformation out there from both sides, probably, I would argue. Because I know the process and you know you've heard me say this, the process was not perfect. Do not get me wrong. I'm not saying this was a very perfect process that was going smoothly.

But was there any direct conversations, whether from you or the Premier, with communities in my district before making this decision for the Towns of Burgeo, Ramea, even so far as Grey River, some harvesters, because the map that was last there was far as La Poile, I think, in my district. I know some harvesters there had concerns as well.

So there was a small portion off McCallum that I know was a protected area that wanted to be included by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. However, even cancelling the MOU – which I know you and your staff know this – they can still do that. That is still within their purview to do that 5 per cent that they want included and they wanted that little piece off. But the chunk of the map was in my district and in my community.

So was there any prior consultation with the communities directly affected, the municipalities and those in the community to hear what they thought about it?

C. TIBBS: The short answer would be yes. I mean, anybody can sit here and say yes and that's the information that they went by. I wouldn't dare to give up any names or confidential material, but I can say that there were community leaders that reached out to me well before this decision was made and begged and pleaded not to go ahead with this for one reason or another.

I think moving forward what we need to do – and I’ve had this conversation, again, with my federal counterpart – is that we need a clear, concise plan moving forward that’s going to address our biggest concerns right off the top, whether it be industry and growth. We need to address those concerns immediately as we move forward with any other conservation plan.

So that’s a conversation that I’m going to continue to have with my federal counterpart and, of course, with the department here and with whatever community leaders may be involved. Again, it was at the start of my mandate, and it may have seemed premature at the time, but that was a decision that we made. We do stand by that decision right now.

But make no mistake, we’re going to look for different, new conservation areas in the future, and if another conservation area comes up for the South Coast and we can mitigate those concerns and issues right off the top, then absolutely, if we can find a way forward, to make a conservation area viable for a community that’s something that we are all in on. Because this government and Premier Wakeham cares about conservation and he has given me a mandate to get more conservation areas throughout the province and to work with the community affected by them.

Again, the short answer would be, yes, I’ve had conversations before this decision was made with community leaders from different communities down your way, conversations with people in your own caucus who thanked me for making that decision. Obviously, we won’t say who, but it was a fracture, it seemed to be a fracture across the province and we don’t want that. We want the next conservation area to come out clean and smooth and for most of the people to see the value in it.

That’s something that we’re going to continue to work towards. If something else comes up on the South Coast, MHA King, I

can guarantee that you will be heavily involved with me in making that decision.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John’s East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O’LEARY: My apologies. Are we under section 2?

CHAIR: Yes.

S. O’LEARY: I’m completed with section 2. Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I figured 10 minutes wouldn’t do it, but I’ll just continue to have this discussion because I know this is still very important to a lot of people in my district.

Minister, I would just say, especially during the campaign because that was obviously door-to-door for me, a lot of conversations I had – and don’t get me wrong, I know, I had conversations just like you, people who really didn’t want it and there was a lot of people who were for it. In the end, I think most people did agree that for the feasibility study just to finish, as I’ve mentioned to you before, just to see what that would have looked like.

Sorry, I just lost my train of thought, actually. I’m thinking about – oh my God, it’s gone.

C. TIBBS: Just take your time.

M. KING: The comment that you had made actually about – anyway, I’ll turn it over to you while I think about that, it’s lost.

C. TIBBS: Okay, I’ll talk for a moment while you think about that. It happens all the time,

b'ys. Let me talk for a moment until you get your thoughts together.

I heard, of course, from many people that wanted this as well. There was the Qalipu Nation, of course, they were in favour of it, or at least to see the feasibility study go through. We get the concerns and we get how important conservation is to people and how it would have affected the South Coast with your tourism and stuff like that. We totally understand that. We're just trying to find, once again, the balance that works for everybody.

Newfoundland and Labrador is extremely diverse. So, again, we want to make sure that we strike that balance with conservation and protecting any industries that we may have across the province.

You got her?

M. KING: Thank you to my good researchers for taking notes, and it's back to me now.

Back to the feasibility study part and you saying doing new areas in the future. I will argue that this process was over 20 years in the making, and I think that speaks to the complexities of having a feasibility study like this because of the disagreements that you can have. I think that's what we were seeing.

As I mentioned, there was acknowledgement that communication needed an improvement. We know that the federal government, Parks Canada, was doing a lot of the communication part. I didn't agree with some of that. I think that it needed to be improved as well.

But it comes back to trying to see that process through. I'm just giving my opinion a bit, I had wished that you had taken the time – and I respect your decision you made; that's your decision to make. But I wish that we had just paused it. I think that would have given this a bit of potential to

look at where we were, what we were doing wrong and then resume back to what you, as the government, because, obviously, it would've been your decision, to have seen it going forward.

I know that industry played a big part of this as well, the aquaculture industry, especially. Like I said to you today, I certainly support that industry. I'm not against that industry at all, the fishing industry, the mining industry, all very important industries in my district.

Was there any work done during the feasibility study on potential risk to those industries from the department, because I know obviously the government was a signatory in the MOU so I know your officials would have done a lot of work on that? Was there any work done prior to the cancellation on that?

C. TIBBS: I appreciate the question. By the way, I got just as many back and forths as you as well, especially on the South Coast.

I think that Susan may have a bit more information within that question.

S. SQUIRES: Certainly, there was a lot of work done on aquaculture. Early on, aquaculture was identified as an industry that had concerns and had a lot of questions, certainly very valid questions, around their ability to transport fish through the Marine Protected Area, how close the Marine Protected Area would be to their existing sites or ability to expand.

So there was a subcommittee set up by the Steering Committee who had all aquaculture companies on the South Coast, had members that could sit on that subcommittee of the Steering Committee, as well as the Industry Association. There were attempts made by the Steering Committee to address their concerns, such as reducing the size of the proposed protected area coming out of the fjords farther away from the existing sites, those sorts of measures. There were

commitments by Parks Canada to look at things like regulation changes that would address some of the concerns on transportation through. There was a lot of ongoing conversations, right up until the decision was made.

M. KING: Thank you for that, ADM, I know you probably were part of those conversations as well. I know there was a lot of work done before that so I want to thank you for that and all the staff that did work on it.

Minister, I will say to you, as well, from that perspective, the industry is not directly in my district yet. I know there has been some work with the Burgeo plant on some of the die-off that happened. I hear from residents and I think it's obviously my duty to bring this up to you, I guess, as an elected official.

We look at the Bay de Loup and White Bear Bay, especially in the Burgeo-Ramea area, very, very important areas to the people down there. I know there is some potential, possibly, for aquaculture expansion into those bays. I would certainly say to you to definitely consult, which I know you would, but consult very heavily with those areas because they have a lot of concerns.

I will say to you that the Town of Ramea, specifically, about the aquaculture industry going in that bay; that bay is very sacred to them, culturally. I know to the Indigenous people in that area as well, but I know a number of people who use that for salmon fishing, their cabins are there, eco-tourism industry is significantly growing down there – a lot of potential growing from there. They have some serious concerns with that so I hope you would take that upon any future development to consult properly with those communities.

Before I turn it back to you, I'll just add a question to that. Did the department complete a formal environmental or socio-economic risk assessment as well before the process was halted?

C. TIBBS: I'll address the preamble there and I'll pass it over to Susan again.

This doesn't work without the communities. So to your point about Ramea, yes, we'll make sure that we have good conversations and good communication. Like I say, when I talk about accessibility, I enjoy talking to people. This government doesn't work without the input of the communities which are affected. Premier Wakeham has given us great advice. He's given us great direction, which is to get out and start listening to the people that are going to be affected by your decisions as ministers. That's something that we plan to do.

So in order to strike that balance, make no mistake, we'll be inside these communities and before we make any huge decisions, we will ensure that the right work is done.

I think I can pass it over to Susan to answer the rest of the question there.

S. SQUIRES: The template Parks Canada has where there is a common approach to feasibility studies is that it would include some economic factors, whether it's positive, you know, tourism gains or whether there are concerns around forestry or mining or other industries. As they got feedback from stakeholders, because there was Mining Industry NL and various folks, those things got incorporated into the steering committee's understanding and various descriptions of the economic impacts of this proposed site.

We didn't complete a formal one in the sense of a consultant that would do a stand-alone economic study, but that was certainly talked about and I think those were maybe some of the lessons learned from this process are some of those pieces of work may need to be done earlier to address concerns.

In some incidents, I understand with Parks Canada, the process of including that economic review within the feasibility study

is enough to answer everyone's questions. In this particular situation, it didn't seem to be enough.

M. KING: Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

I guess the department was a part of the steering committee, so I'll kind of ask a different question because it probably would have crossed a couple of departments. As the minister knows, I bring up tourism a lot.

Was there any economic benefits looked at from a tourism growth perspective, a jobs perspective, federal funding injection or research investment potentials? Was any of that worked on?

S. SQUIRES: Very similar to kind of what I just explained in the sense of, yes, Parks Canada had laid out some examples that the steering committee could consider and the community could consider as to how they would gain from this.

They took similar sized sites across the country and gave us some examples around what the community might expect for visitation or tourism potential, ecotourism potential. The steering committee spoke to folks with ecotourism businesses and tourism businesses as well, so it wasn't just industry in the sense of resource industry, and so all of that was also being included.

In a manner, as I described, in the sense of documenting what those experts suggested would be our economic benefit to that community, if we had gone through a formal economic assessment, that would have included benefits and concerns.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I know my colleague from Gander has more questions, but I think –

B. FORD: No, I'm good.

M. KING: No? You don't?

B. FORD: Keep going.

M. KING: Could I keep going another 10 minutes, please, if that's okay?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I don't have a lot more to say about this obviously, but I think it is an important discussion, like I said, especially to the residents of my district. The ADM kind of touched on this a bit because, part of the feasibility study that we didn't get to was the negotiating phase, which I think was a very, very important part of making sure we knew what it looked like, having all the signatories be a part of exactly what that conservation on paper would look like.

The important part of that is that all five signatories had to unanimously agree. So we could have been another, potentially, hypothetical obviously, 10 years out by the time we had actually got five signatories to agree. I'm sure that is not easy to get a federal-provincial government, insert some towns in there, Indigenous groups, to agree on exactly what it looks like.

I know that if it did reach the final stage as well – and I can be corrected as well if I'm wrong here, but if changes were to be made in the future, if it had finalized and it was in place, all groups had to agree again and come back to the table. I think there was a five-year review that had finished, but I think that is important as well is talking about community engagement, back to communities looking at what their potential are, if they disagree or agree.

I heard concerns from the mining industry. I heard concerns from the fishing industry. I heard concerns from the aquaculture industry. My colleague, in this House, we didn't name, of course, but I know the aquaculture industry is very important to his district and I certainly support that as well. I

know the jobs are certainly important and any potential for jobs is important, but we want to see that done in an environmentally sustainable way. I think this could have been an important part of that.

A quick question that could probably be answered, was there a cost to the department for being a part of this feasibility study?

C. TIBBS: I'll go to Susan again.

S. SQUIRES: There wasn't a cost. So existing resources like time of staff were used. There was some travel cost but that was within our zero-based budget already and Parks Canada supported the other stakeholders in their participation. So it wasn't a cost to the department.

M. KING: Could you talk a little bit about how – a little bit, I guess, because I say from a Parks Canada perspective. I'll ask this question; did they provide any feedback before making your decision as well? The signatories specifically, was there any written correspondence or – I know it was a part of your campaign promise, so I guess people kind of saw that it could potentially happen, but did the signatories express any concerns to you about dropping the feasibility study or the MOU?

C. TIBBS: I'll pass over to Susan again, but before I do, Parks Canada, they were a signatory as you know, but my decision came from what I heard on the ground by the people that feel as though they would have been affected most. When we put out an environmental assessment or anything else, it's incumbent on the project that wants to take place to mitigate the factors that may negatively affect the area in which they want that project to go.

I mean, we learn lessons every single time that we make a decision and there have been many lessons learned for myself in this process as well. Again, with a government here now that is going to be so

driven with different projects, different industries, jobs and growth for this province but not once putting conservation on the back shelf, conservation is just as important. Moving forward, I think that whichever proponents we get involved with, they're going to know that this government supports projects, jobs and paycheques. We will find a balance to put conservation next to that.

Susan, I don't know if you had any more information.

S. SQUIRES: Regarding conversations with the steering committee, because it was an election platform commitment, the steering committee was aware of that as the election was proceeding. All parties knew that that was the intention and the commitment.

M. KING: Thank you.

Minister, the jobs part as well as the growth in our communities is very important and something I touched on today, because I do believe that this also could have been a potential driver for that jobs and growth in the community. Significant investment into a park, making the Sandbanks park a tertiary park and part of the NMCA, I think that was a very important component that was missed as well. Because the tourism industry is so important in that area, as you would have seen after the decision was made.

I will say to you and I know you say that the people disagreed but there is still a lot of people out there that agreed with this going forward. At least, like I said, the feasibility study finishing, just to see what it looked like. I'm sure you've seen the number of tourism operators and people in that industry showing their support.

I think they saw the potential of what could have been, even from an economic side and an economic driver for this province because building on the tourism capital of Canada, I think that would have been a significant boost and something for you to

certainly consider going forward when you're talking about potentially more conservation areas.

I'll kind of end it there because we have gone on a little bit on this area, but I know the minister knows this is important to me, the people that I represent. I know it wasn't agreed upon, but I just want to reiterate that trying to finish the feasibility study would have been important. I know there was a lot of good work from your department and all the signatories put into that.

I hope to see something in the future, potentially, maybe the same or working with those communities to see what they want to see going forward. Like I said, the tourism industry, ecotourism, people are looking for that. People want to see that. Our visitors are coming for that. I think communities can build on that for economic growth in their communities, as well as still supporting those traditional industries like fishery and aquaculture.

I will end that section on that, but I appreciate the dialogue here tonight on that matter.

C. TIBBS: I appreciate it as well. Oil and gas is my background, but tourism is also my background. I studied in Europe and I worked at it in Europe. We wanted to take those findings back here to Newfoundland and Labrador. We had some great findings and we implemented a lot of those areas back in the early 2000s, I guess, when I came back.

I know how important tourism is to the South Coast. I know how important it is to this province and the jobs that it creates. I know this project started out with a much bigger area and then it shrunk down a little bit. There's no reason why we can't look at conservation areas, maybe a little bit smaller in the future for that area to protect those parks that you talked about, because we take conservation extremely seriously in this government. We want to make sure that

every community is afforded the opportunity to have a conservation area to protect what's most important to their culture and heritage. That's going to be just as important with my mandate moving forward, as is Jobs and Growth, so I'll leave it at that.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: No further questions?

Seeing no further questions for this subhead, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive, Environment.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.3.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.3.01 carried.

CHAIR: I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Climate Change.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 carry?

I now call on the Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Chair, I'm actually going to turn it over to my colleague from Gander, if you would recognize her, please.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, the department released two new Climate Change Action Plans, mitigation and adaptation. What are the top priority actions for 2026-27 and what matrix will be used to measure progress?

C. TIBBS: Could you repeat the question, my apologies.

B. FORD: Yes, sure.

The department released two new Climate Change Action Plans; one was on mitigation and adaptation. What are the top five priority actions for 2026-27 and what matrix will you use to measure progress?

C. TIBBS: I may pass over to Valerie in a moment but I'll touch on this real quick here.

We understand that addressing climate change is crucial for economic development and sustainable future, including actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change within the department.

We will create a climate action plan with clearly achievable emission reduction targets and support communities in adapting to climate change and recovery from its impacts. Once our plan is finalized, we'll provide direct aid to residents affected by climate-related disasters including floods, wildfires and severe storms.

Those three things there would be top of our climate change moving forward.

I don't know if Valerie wanted to add something else to that.

V. SNOW: Yeah, I think our main priorities have remained consistent over the last many years. I think a big focus will be on continuing the very positive trajectory we

have right now on reducing emissions overall. We have the lowest emissions in the province since 1994. We're on track to meet our 2030 targets and the plan outlays a path to net-zero as well. I think that is certainly overarching priority to keep on that path.

Part of that will be continuing to implement our *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act* which sets reducing targets each year for large industry in the province. They've been meeting and exceeding those targets each year, so working with them to ensure that trend continues.

Supporting homeowners in transitioning off oil heating. That's a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions in the province. I think about 8,000 by the end of this year should have been transitioned off, so that's significant.

You mentioned the Adaptation Plan as well and that's certainly an emerging issue, a focus for the province and for Canada as well. So we'll be looking at providing communities with tools to increase their resilience to climate change impacts, such as the climate change adaptation tool that we mentioned earlier, the online tool that was rolled out this year for municipalities.

Working with other government departments to do things like prepare for natural disasters, we're talking about flood-risk mapping, drought warning, that would require a cross-government approach to work with our sister departments and assist in that. So it's not just the climate change adaptation after the fact but also predicting where climate change impacts might occur.

C. TIBBS: If I may just touch on that as well.

Ms. O'Leary, I think, asked before about our Climate Change Action Plan and where it is. It's something that we are continuously working on through this department every

single day to formulate. I will roll this out early in my mandate for review.

B. FORD: Thank you.

How is the department ensuring that the climate programs – and I appreciate the ones that you just referenced there – are accessible to rural, remote and low-income households, in particular?

C. TIBBS: I can get Valerie to talk about that a little bit more.

V. SNOW: Yes, I can certainly do that, and then Susan may be able to fill in a few details, too.

In particular, the Oil to Electric heating program, we've made refinements to that over the years to ensure that the maximum rebate goes to low-income families for that. It's about \$22,000 for almost complete coverage of the cost of transitioning a home onto electric heat. That was really focused on trying to have lower-income households being able to participate and receive the maximum benefit.

The tools that we're rolling out now, such as the online climate adaptation tool, is really designed for smaller communities to be able to put in their own parameters, their own sort of landscape, their own challenges, and it will help them develop climate change – we mentioned infrastructure earlier, that's one of the things it can help with.

It's really designed to be bespoke for each individual small community. It's not just a large-scale policy we are rolling out for the whole of government. It's a tool that can be used by the smallest communities to figure out how they can best prepare for climate change.

Do you have anything else to add? Yeah, I think that's it.

B. FORD: Thanks.

In the budget line under Grants and Subsidies, I'm just looking, budget 2025-26 it was \$3.7 million, revised to \$1.3 million and now there is nothing budgeted.

Minister, why the significant change there?

C. TIBBS: Thank you for the question, Ms. Ford.

That decrease reflects budget reduction for the Electric Vehicle Rebate Program and the electrical vehicle infrastructure program. Of course, the EV program that we've had here in the province ran its course in March and another one wasn't offered, along with the other nine provinces that didn't offer it.

There is, of course, a federal program now that people can avail to, and I would encourage them to do so.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Minister, I'd request that you refer to me as MHA Ford.

C. TIBBS: My apologies.

B. FORD: I'd prefer that, thank you.

Minister, what is the long-term strategy for EV charging infrastructure and how will the department address gaps in those rural and remote regions?

C. TIBBS: I can get Valerie to talk a little bit about that.

We work with the PUB to try to get more infrastructure within the province, especially within our rural areas. We know how it affects tourism and everyday life. That is something that is regulated through Hydro and the PUB.

I can get Valerie to maybe comment a bit more on that.

V. SNOW: The EV infrastructure grid has been growing in the province consistently

over the last few years. We did have a plan in place through Hydro to install an additional 11 fast chargers in areas, as you mentioned, MHA Ford, about filling gaps. The process for that involves PUB approval and, unfortunately, it did not go through this last year, but we're still planning to work with Hydro to move that forward. Susan has some information about the network and how it has built over the years, the number of chargers and where our plans are, if you'd like to hear a little bit more about that.

Susan, did you want to –?

B. FORD: Thank you.

I guess specifically where the plans are going forward?

S. SQUIRES: Over the years, we've been intentional with partners such as Newfoundland Hydro on where they need to be. Our first goal was to focus across the Trans-Canada Highway and then it was moving up and down the various peninsulas and Labrador and whatnot.

We work with a model of about 65 kilometres between each charger. You can't have too big of a gap or you can't keep going. The map is pretty good. There are some gaps and, as Deputy Minister Snow said, we've been filling them in. The last round of chargers that are coming online over the last few months and right now were 11 ultra-fast chargers. The fastest ones we put in in places like Deer Lake, Gander, Clarendville, Conne River and Whitbourne.

We had a number more that we intended to put in in Corner Brook, Grand Falls, Carbonear, St. John's, Hawke's Bay, L'Anse-au-Loup and Port Hope Simpson, but those are the ones that, right now, are on pause until we can get the PUB issue addressed.

B. FORD: Okay. Thank you.

Is there any indication of what that PUB issue is and when it might be addressed?

S. SQUIRES: The concern was electric vehicle chargers. While we were paying most of the cost, there was still an operation and maintenance cost that would have been borne by Hydro. The PUB ruling is publicly available, as all public rulings, and some of the concern was around impacts on ratepayers generally with ongoing maintenance and costs of these chargers overtime.

While the numbers of EVs have grown substantially in the last five years, there is still no business model where these charges are completely self-sufficient. That's why you see governments across the country, including Canada, still supporting EV chargers to get the ball rolling.

That was primarily their concern. There are appeals, opportunities and different things that hydro is considering, and we're certainly watching.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Thanks, Chair. I see my time is up there.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

To continue in the climate change vein, and I thank my colleagues for the great questions that they brought forward in regard to conservation, and of course electric vehicles, I'll just continue on that. Some of my questions have already been answered.

How many performance credits were purchased by industry in the last year and how much money did that raise?

S. SQUIRES: So there are a few types of credits. All the large industries can purchase credits from one another, and the cost of

that is not something that is publicly disclosed unless they wish to do so. So I don't have a cost for that.

Individual companies can also buy credits, if they have to, from the government. Those funds go in a pot, and that money can only be used for greenhouse gas reduction projects. For example, in 2004, another half a million dollars went into that Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund as a result of credit purchases by those companies.

There's a publicly available statement that we have to do every year under the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act*. For example, in 2004, there were 542,514 credits issued and there was another 324,402 submitted by companies for compliance, and all those values were there over time.

S. O'LEARY: What does that accumulated pot that you're referring to get used for, typically? What is the future intent for that?

S. SQUIRES: Sure.

Under the *Management of Greenhouse Gas Act*, there is a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Advisory Council. That council has external members selected by the Independent Appointments Commission.

They get together and can do a call for bids to intake project ideas from companies, such as the large facilities, as well as smaller companies, that would be in this sector, manufacturing, mining and those sorts of companies. They can submit proposals to use some of that money to do a greenhouse gas reduction project, and that Advisory Council has to make a recommendation to the minister as to whether that project should proceed.

So what the Advisory Council had done, because the money started being collected in 2019, was they let the pot grow for a little bit. When we had about half a million dollars, they did a call for bids and they

issued that half a million dollars last year, actually, to a project in Labrador putting high-efficiency woodstoves in communities that run off a diesel generator to reduce that diesel use.

S. O'LEARY: Oh, okay!

S. SQUIRES: The pot will likely grow for another few years. Under the act, we have to make recommendations every five years, so the money can't sit there in perpetuity.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

I'm happy to hear that it went into something that I certainly think is very appropriate. Hopefully it will stay with the smaller kind of industry projects. I mean, it's not a huge amount of money but, obviously, we don't want to see that money go into bigger companies that can take care of their own. That's really positive to hear. Thank you.

We already discussed the Climate Change Mitigation Plan and Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, and I thank you for the comments that were made about the top priority for 2026-27, as asked by my colleague, but does the government plan to retain and follow the 2025-2030 plan that was established by the previous administration? Will that continue?

C. TIBBS: I'll pass it off to Valerie here, because she was here long before me.

V. SNOW: I think that when government came in, they pledged to release new climate change action plans, so we will be working on developing new climate change action plans.

We're working on it now, starting sort of the information gathering and stakeholder engagement and that sort of thing. So we are working on developing new plans. I believe that a lot of the overarching, sort of evergreen type climate change goals, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, will remain the same, but the approach to it and

the specifics targets that have been identified and the focus on community engagement and support with adaptation, I think there may be increased focus on that in the new plans that we are working on.

S. O'LEARY: So that will obviously have heavy public engagement about that one that finally comes forward?

V. SNOW: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: We want to make sure that everybody knows.

V. SNOW: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: All right. Thank you.

How many EVs are currently on the road in this province? What percentage of vehicles do they represent? Is that data that you have?

C. TIBBS: I'll pass it off to Susan. I don't know if Susan has that data?

S. SQUIRES: Yes.

We have 2,080 electric vehicles in the province as of Q3 2025; that's the last data. We have another additional 948 plug-in hybrids. Those are the two types of vehicles we would consider in the EV package, but that represents a fraction of the total number of vehicles. We have an additional 8,697 hybrid vehicles in the province.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

How many people availed of the EV Rebate last year?

S. SQUIRES: In '25-'26, 572 rebates were issued for electric vehicles.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

I'm just double-checking; one moment please.

C. TIBBS: Take your time, Ms. O'Leary. (Inaudible) –

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

It's just we have some great minds thinking alike, so I'm just double-checking to see what questions have been already asked.

How many people have been served by the Oil to Electric home heating program in the past year – I think that we touched on that already – and how many households still use oil as a source of heat?

S. SQUIRES: In '25-'26, 1,927 rebates were issued under the Oil to Electric Program. The program has been going for a number of years, so we've issued 5,180 over the course of this Oil to Electric Program so far. We're anticipating another 2,000 to 3,000 before the program is done.

When we started working on Oil to Electric for homeowners, we had an estimate of about 40,000 homes being on oil. There is no perfect data; some of those might be secondary homes. This program is focused on primary homeowners. After this batch is done, we think we've certainly put a very big dent in the primary homeowners and their use of oil.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

How many people have availed of the Home Energy Savings Program?

S. SQUIRES: That program is not with us; it's with Housing. The Home Energy Savings Program is a program they have for making homes more efficient.

We did come along under the cost-shared program we had with the federal government between 2019 and 2024. We had a matching program for those folks just on oil. It was a few years ago now, so I don't have the number at the top of my head, but I think we had about \$8 million and all that went out the door for folks to do energy

efficiency upgrades to their homes. That money was provided to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and they implemented the program alongside their own.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

I want to ask a question on solar energy, which is a personal interest of mine. I am hearing a lot of success in some industry there and certainly what the government's present efforts or intent is to continue down that road. Because we know that solar energy is something very viable, even in Newfoundland and Labrador, which a lot of people don't think is actually feasible.

Thank you.

C. TIBBS: No, thank you very much for the question.

I love the exploration of new, innovative ways – not new because it's not new by no means, but I think that there's a place for all these innovations, even in Newfoundland and Labrador, we get a lot of cloud and rain and stuff. But make no mistake, these are things that we're going to be exploring through the department as we move forward and if it makes sense and it's feasible for the province, that's something we can look into.

I mean, between the wind as a renewable resource now, solar is yet another one. That's something that we can definitely discuss with the department moving forward and we'll take your comments moving forward. You have my word that that's a discussion that we'll have.

S. O'LEARY: Chair, if I could just, the final comment on that particular topic.

CHAIR: Go ahead.

S. O'LEARY: I am in consult with both businesses that employ that in residential homes and as well as residents who have

implemented it, to great success. So I will be bringing it to your attention.

C. TIBBS: I appreciate it.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: I just want to announce that we'll reaching the end of our head of expenditure at 9:10 p.m. That will be a stop, but we'll be having a hard stop at 9:15 p.m.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo- La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I'll keep my questions concise as we watch the time to share with my colleagues, if they have any more questions.

Minister, just a kind of general question of the top. In the Budget Speech climate change was mentioned once, I think it was, according to my research. I could be proven wrong and it was a kind of indirect mention. We are seeing, in this division, an overall general decrease in the budget.

What assurances can you provide the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that your government will take climate change seriously?

C. TIBBS: Our actions will be our word and what we do with climate action plans and what we do with reducing our targets moving forward and working with the producers and working with industry, that will be the legacy that we leave and that'll be the proof that we do take conservation and climate change seriously in this department.

I talked about it earlier. I do come from an oil and gas industry. In order to tackle some of the climate change that we have, we need funds and we need revenue in order to come up with new and innovative ways to

do this. Some of that money, of course, will come from our oil and gas industry. As we move forward, we'll come up with different ways of tackling the climate change that we have. We'll reach across the country to our counterparts and see what they're doing in collaboration moving forward. That's something, again, we do take it extremely seriously.

We look at the wildfires that we had over that past year and as they become increasingly more concerning throughout the province and the drought and the floods, people talk about climate change on a daily basis. I read something there the other day that 97 per cent of scientists say that climate change is real, yet you have a population that still doesn't believe in it. We know it is real. We know how it affects communities across this province. We know how it affects different stakeholders and organizations across the province.

Premier Wakeham's government definitely takes climate change extremely seriously. It's something that we know that we need to tackle moving forward. We'll work with the communities. We'll work with the stakeholders across the province. It doesn't work without the communities that are affected by it each and every day, especially when it comes to coastal erosion.

We have thousands of kilometres of coastline around this beautiful Island of ours and especially up on the Big Land as well. We want to protect our coastline. We see increasing flooding. We see increased fires. It's there. We know it's there. The proof is right there. The only thing that we need to do now is prove that this department and this government takes it seriously, and we will be judged on the actions that we take during this mandate.

M. KING: I appreciate that, Minister. I'm sure myself and all our colleagues here will be watching those actions closely for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The next question is on coastal erosion. What is your plan, in general, to address coastal erosion but, especially, in unincorporated areas where there is not even a Local Service District or a council? How does your department plan to tackle that issue?

C. TIBBS: I can pass it down the line again, but, like I say, we take coastal erosion extremely seriously. Out of all the issues that we're seeing – besides the fires which directly impact residents across this province – that's one that we need to identify and we need to come up with a mitigation plan for the erosion that we have.

I think that we can pass it down to Susan to talk a little bit more about coastal erosion and our plans to deal with it moving forward.

S. SQUIRES: So a few years ago, I want to say 2022, we did produce a coastal erosion handbook for municipalities and then with help of MNL did disseminate that and work on that. There were videos and we worked on that with the Geological Survey of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Costal erosion is a tough one. We can't always stop it. The direction that we're seeing around the world in many places is it's a risk-mitigated approach moving from preventative measures, engineered structures, right to retreat. That can be challenging for homeowners and communities to hear. It's not that one (inaudible) will work for everyone. In Municipalities, and Transportation and Infrastructure, we have funded things like breakwaters and whatnot for communities who have come forward with this.

The cost-benefit tool that was referred to a few other times this evening, that has come out just in the past month or so. We'll help communities look at that and assess if our coastal road is starting to erode, do we look at retreating that or moving that inland or is there other things that we can consider, because maybe over the long term that's

more cost effective than trying to put in a breakwater, for example? It gives an opportunity to look at those things and puts the decision-making power in their hands, maybe they can do some decisions now that will save them money over the long term.

It really comes down to individual communities and individual stories of homeowners and understanding what type of erosion they have and what options they have. It's not one solution.

M. KING: No, I didn't expect that it would be one solution for sure as each community, each area is different. I certainly appreciate the information. Thank you.

Just one final question from me and then I'll pass it along to my colleagues if they have any more.

In section 3.2.01 under Policy, Planning and Natural Areas under the Revenue, both the Federal and Provincial, we are seeing a decrease from the budgeted amount down to the estimated amount. Federal has no budget there and Provincial has dropped from \$94,000 to \$55,000.

Could you explain that difference, please?

C. TIBBS: I think I can pass that one down to Susan Squires, as well.

S. SQUIRES: Within Policy, Planning and Natural Areas there was some federal revenue associated with some additional natural heritage planners. We had that revenue for a four-year period under a cost agreement with them. That sunset this year. It came to its natural end. That's why you see a decrease from *Budget 2025* to *Budget 2026*, so that program has ended. Those four years ran out.

There was a small decrease within the 2025-26 budget year simply because there were some vacancies in one of those positions for a little bit.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Again, my colleague has asked numerous questions, certainly about conservation and the marine conservation issue in his district. Some of the opposition to the South Coast and MCA seems to have been generated by confusion between a marine protected area versus the national marine conservation area.

I'm just trying to delineate whether or not which is restrictive, the NMCA, which is far less so. Did your department do anything to clear up the confusion and, if not, could you point to the specific parts of the MOU that gave you and other opponents concern?

C. TIBBS: I'm going to pass along to Susan, again. Susan, do you have any comment on it?

S. SQUIRES: You're correct. The marine protected areas under the *Oceans Act* and the national marine conservation areas under Parks Canada legislation, they are very different. Often marine protected areas are put in place to protect much smaller areas for very specific ecological reasons. The goal of a national park, water or land, is interaction between ecology and recreational use experience of the land. They are very different.

Parks Canada had a presentation that explained that and many other things, the Q&A document that they shared with any stakeholder who wished to have a meeting and get that sort of one-on-one presentation from that. They did that quite a bit.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Chair, one final question. A lot of our initiatives that we've seen tonight have ended, they've expired, these agreements

that we've seen with the federal government.

Does your department anticipate any new funding sources through the federal Mark Carney government in regard to possible partnerships that could be explored?

C. TIBBS: Just recently, the federal government came out with their conservation plan, I guess. I will be having a meeting with the federal minister again about that and where Newfoundland and Labrador fits as partners with the federal government. I look forward to those conversations because I know how important it is to people across the province. We want to work with our federal counterparts because we live in the most beautiful country in the world and we live in the most beautiful province in the world.

S. O'LEARY: Hear, hear!

Thank you, that's it for me.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Gander.

B. FORD: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, what new ecological reserves or wilderness areas are under consideration for designation in 2026-27?

C. TIBBS: I can pass that off to Valerie for a couple of comments.

V. SNOW: WERAC is the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council and they make recommendations to government on protected areas. They've been reviewing a document called *A Home for Nature* that was produced and lists several for consideration. They've been consulting on several of those over the last two years and are making recommendations, which will be coming to the minister quite shortly on the establishment of further ecological areas in the province.

We've also been meeting with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. They have some very interesting ideas about protections under their banner in the province, particularly around municipalities and municipal water supplies. So those discussions are ongoing as well.

The federal new Nature Strategy that just came out last month also opens doors to a couple of new pathways for establishing conservation areas, which we're very interested in learning more about, broadening criteria and having a little more flexibility than the traditional definition which would obviously give us more flexibility as well.

These are the types of avenues that we're pursuing for new conservation areas.

C. TIBBS: If I could elaborate on that a little bit more. There are several groups that we work with across the province that are extremely important to this department and this government moving forward. We're going to continue that work to find the best-case scenarios where conservation fits for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Again, we talked about it a little bit earlier how we need to strike the balance between industry and whatever conservation areas that we may want to support and put in place. That balance sometimes, it's a difficult balance to find, but with the help of this department and this government, we'll continue to find that balance moving forward.

It's not easy and there are many, many different conversations and different viewpoints and perspectives on it. We invite all perspectives across the province by anybody who would like to help with this process, I encourage anybody across the province to let their voices be heard when it comes to this stuff.

Again, you have two sides of the industry which we want to keep here in

Newfoundland and Labrador – very viable, very successful. We want to grow these industries, but at the same time, take a climate action plan that's going to work, including conservation across the province – both Newfoundland and Labrador.

It's a balance that we're going to strike. It's not going to be easy at times but we will get there.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Specific to ecological or wilderness reserves, under that designation, do you anticipate that there will be some designated this year? I know you said some are coming forward. Do you have a number in mind of how many might be designated?

C. TIBBS: No, we don't have a number in mind. Again, we take it step by step. We take each individual proposal that we get and we talk to our stakeholders; we take it very seriously. I wouldn't put a number on it. We get proposals so often that we're going to make it work for Newfoundland and Labrador. To put a number on it, I think would be a little rudimentary. We can't do something like that right now, but we invite all proposals.

Newfoundland and Labrador is very vast with only 530,000 people so we're going to take a look at our conservation areas and we want to make sure that it falls in line with the rest of Canada and the other nine provinces, as well. We want to be a part of the bigger picture. We don't want to be opposed to it. We'll continue to look for these conservation areas, but make no mistake, they have to work for Newfoundland and Labrador. They have to ensure that our industries are protected, our environment is protected and we can find that balance, and we will.

B. FORD: Thank you.

Minister, you referenced earlier, specific to ecological reserves and wilderness areas,

that you work with many different types of groups. Can you please list for us some of those groups that you would work with?

C. TIBBS: Sure, we just talked about WERAC would be one of the groups, our federal counterparts, our Indigenous groups are a huge voice at the table in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to make sure that it's on record of how much we value our Indigenous voices throughout the province, their perspective and how much conservation means to them in protecting the lands. We've all come here afterwards, after the fact, and we want to make sure that our Indigenous groups are heard. They are valued. We'll continue to do that with any decision that we make in this department.

We see environmental assessments all the time come through where we put it through our Indigenous affairs group as well to get their perspectives on it and see what they think and what would be best for the lands here in the province because it was their lands first.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada and Conservation Corps as well and our federal counterparts as well; I've had several discussions with our federal minister. She is quite clear now on what's important to this province. She's been absolutely extraordinary. I have her cellphone number. I talk to her often and I look forward to future discussions when it comes from the federal government and our federal counterparts.

She does amazing work. She knows exactly what's important to us and our industries along with our conservation. She's committed to helping us strike that balance as well. So we are very happy with the discussions that we've had with our federal counterparts thus far. We look forward to future conversations with any other stakeholders that want to come and propose a conservation area here in the province.

B. FORD: Great, thank you, and thank you, Minister, I share your admiration for our federal Environment minister.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burgeo - La Poile.

M. KING: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the minister and his staff. I'll just make some final remarks. We're finished with our questioning, of course, but I want to thank you folks for all coming here this evening. I know it's probably been a long day for everybody here with the House of Assembly and everything on the go, but I certainly appreciate all the work you do.

I would just say to the minister, quickly again, on the NMCA because he knows how important this is to me in the district and environment, of course, itself. I think of Hurricane Fiona in my district. I think of this issue. There are a lot of important issues top of mind for people in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I hear a lot of opposition to the area itself but not a lot of valid reasons for the opposition to the feasibility study. The opposition is to the area itself, but the feasibility study itself, we heard tonight there was no money put into that so I certainly would encourage you to revisit your decision. I know it was your decision and yours to make, but to revisit that for sure in consideration for the area and the people there.

Just once again I want to thank you all for the work that you do and thank you for being here with us tonight and answering our questions. It's an important part of the budget process, I know, as all new MHA on the Opposition side here tonight participating in the Estimates process for the first time.

Thank you for your patience and your time as we asked questions. It's been an enjoyable part of the budget process for me.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, and staff for the great attention this evening and to my researcher, as well.

I will just provide some final comments. Great discussion here this evening. I would also add Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Network to your list of people to engage with. I know that Nature Conservancy, Conservation Corps and Stewardship Association of Municipalities are excellent organizations. I was a former member of the Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Network and they do great work as well, so I would mention that.

My absolute final comment is we need to work toward a just transition. We know that the oil industry is happening right now and nobody – even though in this House of Assembly we've had comments that the NDP leader, federal leader wants to shut off the taps right now. That's not accurate and that's not true. The reality is we're just looking for a just transition because we know that oil is eventually going to have a final date. We don't want to find ourselves in the same predicament where we have all of our eggs in one basket, which we've, historically, been notorious for. There's a real opportunity for us to get on the renewables and a just transition is what labour unions are looking for, as well as the NDP.

I want to say thank you very much. There'll be a lot more discussion about that going forward, I'm sure.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes Minister Tibbs.

C. TIBBS: Thank you very much, Ms. O'Leary.

I have a lot of respect for your leader. He was my high school teacher growing up, believe it or not. I don't know if he told you that, but he was. He was very inspirational to me. He's a good friend of mine.

I'm with you. Listen, just transition – absolutely. I honestly would love to see it in our lifetime. I don't know if we're going to. We're going to make strides to get there, don't get me wrong, but the world is so dependent on oil and gas right now, which does support our industries.

I believe that better heads will prevail one day into the future where we can stop polluting this planet and still make our way through from our day-to-day lives and activities. I think that's what we all want at some point.

We're going to look forward to innovative ideas over my four-year mandate and working with this great crowd right here. Premier Tony Wakeham has given me some clear direction to listen, learn and find the best way forward when it comes to conservation and tackling climate change for Newfoundland and Labrador.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions for this subhead, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Climate Change.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.2.01 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change carried without amendment.

CHAIR: I'd like to thank the minister, department officials and Committee in attendance.

The next meeting will take place on Friday, May 8, at 9 a.m., to consider the Estimates of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

I ask for a mover for adjournment.

J. POWER: So moved.

CHAIR: Moved by the Member for Labrador West.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.