



Second Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF  
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
(HANSARD)

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**Afternoon Sitting**  
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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR  
Her Honour the Honourable Iona V. Campagnolo, CM, OBC

**SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

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Afternoon Sitting

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MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2006

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

### Introductions by Members

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I have a number of special guests that I would like to introduce today. As members of the House are aware, our Legislative Assembly regularly hosts parliamentary Clerks from other jurisdictions to visit our House through attachment programs. This week I am particularly pleased to welcome some special guests from the Nisga'a Lisims government in New Aiyansh — the first aboriginal participants on attachment to this Legislature.

There'll be a number of people here throughout the week, but today we're joined in the gallery by Tracey Fleck, Nisga'a Lisims government in-house legal counsel. I haven't seen Tracey since she and I graduated from UVic law school together. It's good to reacquaint with her. She is joined, as well, by Bobby Clark, Nisga'a Lisims government legislative assistant. I would ask that the House please join me in making both these guests very welcome today.

[1405]

**Hon. L. Reid:** "Connecting people who care with causes that matter" signifies the very fine work of the Victoria Foundation, which this year is celebrating its 70th anniversary. The Victoria Foundation was established by an act of this Legislature on April 1, 1936, by people who, in the midst of the Depression, had the faith and foresight to establish this foundation.

If you live on southern Vancouver Island, the Victoria Foundation has touched your life. Each year they provide grants to hundreds of charitable organizations. These grants improve people's quality of life, provide better health and living conditions, protect our environment and heritage, and support creativity and artistic expression. The Victoria Foundation assists with community capacity-building. Their work results in more cohesive communities.

The first gift of the Victoria Foundation was in 1936, and it was \$20 from Fannie Gadsden, a generous Victoria resident. A newly created fund for the use of the British Columbia Youth Parliament will assist with the annual operation of the B.C. Youth Parliament session held in these chambers each Christmas, bringing together 16-to-21-year-olds from across British Columbia.

Joining us in the gallery today to mark two milestones — \$70 million on deposit and 70 years of service — are Sandra Richardson, the executive director of the Victoria Foundation; Joan Barton, legislative librarian from 1968 to 2003; and Keri Simmons, chair of the British Columbia Youth Parliament Alumni Society. Hon. members, please make them incredibly welcome.

### Tributes

#### HOCKEY CANADA

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Last December and January, British Columbia had the honour of hosting the World Junior Hockey Championships. Ten teams of over 200

of the world's best young players came to compete in the games in Vancouver, Kelowna and Kamloops, with attendance totalling 400,000 people. No doubt you'll see many of these young players again in 1,410 days when we host the Olympic and Paralympic Games here in British Columbia.

What's important is that all British Columbians embraced the World Junior Hockey Championship. It brought \$30 million into the provincial economy. In fact, it generated \$1.5 million for Hockey Canada across the country, and I think that bodes well. When we think of the gold-medal performance of our women in Torino, the gold-medal performance of our sledge hockey team in Torino, and when we have this kind of support for hockey across the country, we have an opportunity to get three gold medals in 2010.

Certainly, Hockey Canada wanted to say thank you to all of the members of this Legislature, so I wanted to inform the House that Hockey Canada has provided each and every one of you with your own special Hockey Canada jersey with your name on the back of it. Now people are going to be able to recognize you when you walk down the street with this jersey on.

**An Hon. Member:** Hey, we're okay with that.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I was just on the Sunshine Coast on the weekend, and in the immortal words of Han Solo: "Don't get cocky, kid."

The opportunities that we have here are great, but most importantly, it sends a message of thanks from Hockey Canada to all the members of this Legislature. I think we should return that thanks by recognizing the contribution of Hockey Canada.

### Introductions by Members

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm very pleased today to welcome a number of people from the agriculture community to the House. As we were out in front today presenting all the different booths and the 4-H and the fairs and exhibitions circuit, I had some interesting statistics passed on to me. Our farming community is the third most trusted group of individuals in society, behind only firefighters and nurses — and just slightly ahead of politicians. I would like to welcome all the individuals that have come for Agriculture Day, and particularly Steve Thomson and Dick Klein Geltink from the B.C. Ag Council. Welcome to all of them.

**H. Bains:** In the House today is my good friend David Black and Andy Ross from COPE, and many others are with them from their organization. Would the House please join me and extend to them a warm welcome.

[1410]

**Hon. J. van Dongen:** I certainly want to join with the minister in welcoming all the farmers to the Legislature. I do want to welcome a couple of special guests: my son Peter van Dongen, who is here with his wife Clarice Springford. I see that they have another member of the farm media with them — John Wilcox.

I want to declare to you that my son has a conflict of interest, because he writes for the farm media. I just wanted you to know that, Mr. Speaker, and ask the House to make them all welcome.

**J. Kwan:** I rise in the House to introduce Sophie Hije and Jamen Mohsen, I believe — if I mispronounced your name, I apologize — and the Kurdish women's group, which meets in my constituency. I ask the House to please welcome these special guests.

**S. Hawkins:** Visiting from my home province of Saskatchewan is Mrs. Klochko from Education First Foundation in Kamsack, Saskatchewan. They are visiting the precincts here with 25 ESL students between the ages of 16 and 18. They're here to learn about government and parliamentary tradition. I would ask the House to make them very welcome.

**Hon. L. Reid:** I would simply ask the members to make welcome my niece Michelle Greig, who's visiting today.

### Introduction and First Reading of Bills

#### EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME ASSISTANCE STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

Hon. C. Richmond presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: a bill intituled Employment and Income Assistance Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

**Hon. C. Richmond:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

**Hon. C. Richmond:** It's my pleasure to introduce Bill 21, which supports amendments to the Employment and Assistance Act and the Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act. These acts, which came into force in 2002, guide the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance as it carries out its mandate to provide income assistance, disability assistance and employment programs for British Columbians in need.

The act supports a culture of personal responsibility, self-reliance and employment, and gives ministry staff the tools required to provide assistance, create opportunity and support independence. The amendments I am introducing today are intended to increase our ability to serve our clients in a fair and caring way while at the same time strengthening and protecting the sustainability and integrity of the British Columbia employment and assistance program.

The amendments include legislation in three areas: definitions of "dependent" and "spouse," sanctions for inaccurate or incomplete reporting of circumstances, and information-sharing agreements.

The definitions of dependent and spouse are critical components in how the ministry determines eligibility

for assistance. To ensure that individuals receiving income assistance who reside with another person or persons are treated fairly and consistently, we are proposing to amend these definitions to ensure that they clearly distinguish between true spousal-dependency relationships and relationships of people who the ministry would not expect to support each other financially.

We are also seeking to introduce legislation that will encourage clients to accurately and completely report their circumstances related to income and assets and their employment and family-unit status — legislation that will result in fewer overpayments and less abuse of our programs. This change also ensures that clients who take the necessary steps to provide accurate information are treated fairly.

Finally, we're seeking to change how the ministry enters into information-sharing agreements with other ministries, provinces, the government of Canada and other agencies. This change, while not in any way compromising our clients' personal information, will allow the ministry to more effectively participate in cross-government research projects and explore new methods for improving how we deliver services to our clients.

I move that the bill be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today. [1415]

Bill 21, Employment and Income Assistance Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

#### SUPPLEMENTS REPEAL ACT

Hon. W. Oppal presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: a bill intituled Supplements Repeal Act.

**Hon. W. Oppal:** I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

**Hon. W. Oppal:** You will no doubt be impressed by the brevity of my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to introduce Bill 26, Supplements Repeal Act. This bill will make law more certain and predictable and will allow for a more efficient use of resources by repealing or by re-enacting all the remaining provisions from the 1996 statutory supplements. These supplements contain all the provisions that were enacted but not put in force at that time and are still not in force today. Bill 26 will repeal outdated supplements that will never be brought into force; allow for other supplements to be repealed by regulation, if and when appropriate; and re-enact supplements that remain potentially useful and may still be brought into force at a later date.

I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.



Bill 26, Supplements Repeal Act, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

#### RESORT TIMBER ADMINISTRATION ACT

Hon. O. Ilich presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: a bill intituled Resort Timber Administration Act.

**Hon. O. Ilich:** I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

**Hon. O. Ilich:** I am pleased to introduce Bill 24, which creates the Resort Timber Administration Act. Government released its resort strategy and action plan in November of 2004. One of the recommendations featured in the resort strategy is the need for improved efficiency in the resort development application and approval process.

The Resort Timber Administration Act will enable the transfer, by regulation, of specific powers and responsibilities under the Forest Act and the Forest and Range Practices Act from the Minister of Forests and Range to the Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts. This act will enable officials of the ministry to authorize timber harvesting and associated actions for Crown timber management for the purpose of all-seasons resort development.

This bill also introduces amendments to the Forest Act. These amendments will enable the creation of new types of forestry licences to cut that could be used to facilitate timber harvesting for resort development purposes.

I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 24, Resort Timber Administration Act, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

#### Statements (Standing Order 25B)

##### ROSEWOOD MANOR

**J. Yap:** I rise today to talk about the imminent completion of 30 new rooms at the Rosewood Manor care home in my riding of Richmond-Steveston. Vancouver Coastal Health Authority provided \$6.5 million for this addition, and a further \$218,000 was raised by Rosewood Manor's volunteers for electric beds and other furnishings.

By 2010 Richmond is projected to have 44 percent more seniors. Rosewood Manor is a 120-resident, not-for-profit facility that will help address the needs of

Richmond's aging population. Rosewood Manor's campus of care is renowned for its quality of service, including a memory-impaired floor.

[1420]

Rosewood Manor Foundation initiated the Furnish a Room campaign to raise \$218,000 to provide the electric beds and other furnishings for the Manor's 30 new rooms. With the help of community development director Adrienne White, their fundraising target was achieved. Richmond truly came together and got behind the Furnish a Room campaign. The poppy fund, Army, Navy and Air Force Local 284, the Richmond firefighters and many individuals donated their time and money to Furnish a Room. I'm also very proud of my Rotary club, the Richmond Sunset Rotary Club, for their contribution to this campaign.

The Furnish a Room campaign was so successful that Volunteer Richmond awarded the Rosewood Manor Foundation the Nova Star award for innovation in volunteering. It's great to see the community of Richmond come together to support our seniors and get behind our government's great goal to build the best system of support in Canada for seniors. With projects like the Rosewood expansion, we're making progress towards adding 5,000 assisted-living and residential care beds throughout B.C. by 2008.

##### NEW CONVENTION CENTRE FOR VICTORIA

**M. Karagianis:** I rise today to speak on my support for a new convention centre for Greater Victoria. It's an idea that is exactly right for the times. In a region where the primary economic engine is the service sector, the infrastructure in the capital region supports a year-round economy of visitors. But to service these visitors and to increase the appeal of our region, we need tourism facilities. That includes an expanded Belleville terminal and a new convention centre.

I spoke about this during the election campaign, and I'm speaking about it again today because it makes sense in very many ways. The *Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce* and *Tourism Victoria* both agree with me. In today's market, a successful convention centre must be able to accommodate larger groups of up to 3,000 delegates and must include an exhibition venue. Our conference centre, created in 1989, is a great facility but doesn't have the capacity that a convention market now demands. A new Victoria convention centre would draw new visitors and markets to our region and add economic value. That's very important for our businesses.

Most of the tourism operators in this region are small to mid-sized businesses, and as the Small Business critic, I know just how much business our community relies on that is generated by both business and leisure travellers. Visitors' spending ripples throughout our local community. With revenues of more than \$1 billion annually, tourism is a key economic driver in this region. I'm thrilled that Vancouver is getting a new world-class convention centre, but Greater Victoria has been left out.

The provincial government needs to take a leadership role, pulling the stakeholders together and working to make a convention centre for Victoria a reality. We're missing out on lucrative business otherwise.

#### PORT MOODY FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

**I. Black:** It is a privilege for me to serve the four communities of Anmore, Belcarra, Port Moody and Coquitlam, whose distinct identities from one another help make my role as a representative fascinating and indeed highly rewarding. Today I get to brag about one of them and the remarkable contribution it makes to our great province.

Over the years Port Moody has repeatedly and rightfully earned its reputation, both provincially and nationally, as the city of the arts. On Friday night I was honoured to celebrate with hundreds of our citizens the opening of the anchor event of Port Moody's annual arts calendar, the ninth annual Festival of the Arts. The mission of the festival is to bring arts and culture to the people. Encouraging a broad degree of engagement and participation, it offers a wonderful opportunity to enjoy world-class performances at prices that allow all to be involved and participate.

The festival is organized by the non-profit Port Moody Arts Centre Society and its hundreds of volunteers. They have consistently and dramatically evolved this festival to not only showcase our home-grown talent but also to attract and include acts of national and growing international stature. Utilizing 22 different theatres, studios and other venues, the festival includes original performances and exhibits of comedy, music, dance, visual arts, provocative film documentaries from around the world and straight-up, hands-on fun for little kids.

When we celebrate arts, culture and heritage, when we take the time to experience a wide diversity of artistic expression, we not only make a statement about our values as a society but also reach out within and beyond our communities to learn, to develop and to allow ourselves to be inspired. Let the bragging begin. Nowhere is it celebrated better and experienced in a more inclusive and world-class fashion than in Port Moody, British Columbia.

[1425]

#### WALK AGAINST RACISM IN CAMPBELL RIVER

**C. Trevena:** I rise today to talk about a joyful but somewhat sad occasion I attended on the weekend. I, along with 400 or so other people, joined in a walk against racism. It was the tenth anniversary walk organized by Campbell River's Multicultural and Immigrant Services Association through the streets of the city. It brought together people of all ages, people of all ethnicities, for a day of celebration — a day where we could relish our ethnic diversity and the fact that we are a truly multicultural society. We ate foods from different cultures, we listened to music, and we

watched entertainment performed by a culturally mixed group of women. We came to share, to learn from one another and to grow as a community.

But it was with sadness that we were doing it — sadness that in the 21st century we still have a need to say no to racism, still have to go out onto the streets to say that racism is wrong and we need to combat it. The Campbell River walk is one of the largest in the province to mark the UN day against racism, which in itself was established to mark the Sharpsville massacre in South Africa.

Racism is an evil — an evil we should not see in our multicultural country. We cannot let fear and ignorance breed racism. MISA, the multicultural organization, has a program, Youth for Diversity, to get that anti-racist message to the city's young people. Those young people were in attendance on Saturday, along with many others. That's why the event on Saturday was so important.

In each community we have to stand up and say that racism is wrong. We need to be able to work together to build our multicultural communities and our multicultural society, so maybe sometime in the future we won't have to walk away from racism, because racism won't exist.

#### AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY IN B.C.

**R. Cantelon:** I rise today to remind the members of the House that you are what you eat. Today is B.C. Agriculture Day and the perfect opportunity for us to recognize the outstanding contribution made by this industry to our province. I believe that we should be very proud of our agricultural sector and the products that they produce.

As we found out this morning, courtesy of the member for Delta South, British Columbia has more diversification in this sector than any other province in Canada. Many of the products we eat and drink every day come from right here in B.C. I don't think enough people recognize that the items like hothouse tomatoes, wines, apples from the Okanagan, grain from the northeast and many meat products are indeed grown and raised right here in our province.

One way we can get out and see the wide variety of products that our agricultural industry is producing is by visiting your local farmers' market on a Sunday morning. It's a great opportunity to get out and purchase fresh and local produce and meet the people who produced it. In my community we have Pipers Meat Cleaver, a retailer for great meat and poultry products, specializing in local island products. Anybody who has had the good fortune to enjoy any of their items knows the benefits of eating healthy, local products.

I would like to finish up by talking about the agriculture planning committee. This committee, which I sit on, will be touring around the province and hearing from British Columbians to establish a sustainable, long-term plan for the agricultural sector. I look forward to being part of this committee and working with the industry and the public to help ensure that our

agriculture sector continues to be a key component of our economy.

#### TERMINATOR SEED TECHNOLOGY

**B. Ralston:** I wish to use the occasion of the visit of representatives of B.C. agriculture to speak about an important agricultural issue. I wish to speak about the so-called terminator seed technology. If adopted, the terminator seed would change agricultural practices in existence since the beginnings of early agricultural civilizations of the Tigris, the Nile, the Indus and the Ganges.

Terminator technology genetically modifies plants to render sterile seeds at harvest. The farmer is thus prevented from replanting seeds from that harvest. Small-scale farmers from around the world face the biggest threat, since their abilities to grow and improve crops depends on selecting seeds and saving seeds from year to year.

For many communities around the world, particularly indigenous ones, seed saving is connected with traditional knowledge relating to agricultural biodiversity and deeply held cultural and spiritual traditions.

[1430]

Environmental groups oppose terminator seeds. They threaten agricultural biodiversity and pose new biosafety threats. The seed and biotechnology industry supports the terminator seed in order to protect corporate patents, particularly of genetically modified seeds, therefore requiring farmers to buy commercial seed each season.

In 2000 the UN convention on biological diversity adopted language that created a de facto international moratorium on terminator seeds, recommending that governments neither field-test nor commercialize genetic seed sterilization technologies. At the UN convention on biological diversity last week in Curitiba, Brazil, the U. S. government — together with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and a number of biotech companies — attempted to open the door to field-testing of terminator seeds by insisting on a case-by-case assessment of such technologies. The working groups of the convention on biological diversity unanimously rejected this proposal.

This issue will doubtlessly return at the 2008 convention. Brazil and India have enacted national laws to ban terminator seeds. I would suggest that the government of Canada should do the same.

#### Oral Questions

##### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS AGAINST B.C. LOBBYISTS

**C. James:** Disturbing allegations involving corruption among senior Liberal appointees have again come to light today. Following police raids at the Legislature two years ago, the Premier claimed: "It was not about government. It was outside government."

My question to the Premier: will the Premier now admit that bribery involving senior political advisers in

the offices of the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Transportation and the public affairs bureau had everything to do with this government?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** I'm sure the member, the Leader of the Opposition, well knows that these matters are presently before the courts. They will be the subject of cross-examination, no doubt, and it would be totally improper for anyone to respond to those allegations at this stage.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Leader of the Opposition has a supplemental.

**C. James:** I do, Mr. Speaker. Six months before the raids on the Legislature, the government changed the law, making it easier for senior political aides to avoid public scrutiny regarding their contacts with the lobby industry. These warrants name high-profile lobbyists with connections to the Liberal Party.

My question to the Premier: can the Premier assure British Columbians that the lobbyists named in these warrants don't still have access to this government?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** The rules are clear. While the Leader of the Opposition may not agree with the rules, the rules are clear that while these matters are before the courts, we do not comment on them.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Leader of the Opposition has a further supplemental.

**C. James:** In fact, that was not a question about the court case. It was a question about government direction. But I'll try again.

The Liberals knew enough about these charges being laid that it fired two high-level political staffers. The government also knew early on that the affair included the conduct of Pilothouse Public Affairs Group.

The raids on the Legislature took place in December '03, yet the Liberal Party continued to accept money from the lobbying firm it knew was part of an RCMP investigation.

My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why the Liberal Party accepted over \$4,000 from Pilothouse Public Affairs Group in 2004 after the raids on the Legislature?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** I can think of no clearer example as to why we have this rule. We have a number of people before the courts who are charged. They're charged with a number of serious offences. It would be totally improper for anyone in this House to comment on the nature of the evidence and the nature of the allegations.

[1435]

##### LOBBYISTS REGISTRATION LEGISLATION

**M. Farnworth:** Let's talk about something that's not before the courts, and that is the Lobbyists Registration Act — an act passed by this chamber. Prior to 2003 the

act was quite specific. Ministerial aides could have been listed if the minister was lobbied. After the changes that were made in 2003, only the minister would be listed as having been lobbied — not staff or any aides or anybody else. Will the Attorney General commit to this House to restore the pre-2003 language to the Lobbyists Registration Act?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** If the member has allegations to make, then he ought to make those allegations. The question is the same; the answer is the same.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain has a supplemental.

**M. Farnworth:** I think the Attorney General needs to differentiate between what's before the courts and the question that we're asking, which is about a piece of legislation that was passed in this chamber. We're talking about the Lobbyists Registration Act. I'm not talking about allegations or a court case. I'm talking about a specific piece of legislation. There are problems with that piece of legislation. Sometimes lobbyists register; sometimes lobbyists don't register. Sometimes they're on time; sometimes they're late. We need to change this.

My question to the Attorney General is this. Will he commit to refer the Lobbyists Registration Act to an all-party standing committee of this House for review and recommendations?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** The government is committed to being the most open and accountable government. The creation of a lobbyist registry was based on two other government registries and tailored for this province. As with any other program, we routinely conduct opinions, and we routinely ask for opinions. If there is a change to be made, we're always amenable to make the legislation more transparent, more accountable and more democratic.

**J. Kwan:** My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier commit today — because this is a matter that impacts all members of this House and is of great import, I think, for all British Columbians — to refer the Lobbyists Registration Act to an all-party committee in this House?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** If there are any persons who have violated the provisions of the act and the legislation, then it surely is the duty of the person who makes the allegations to lay appropriate complaints.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant has a supplemental.

**J. Kwan:** The answer that the Attorney General provided does not actually relate to the matter that I have raised.

My question to the Premier is this. This is an issue about accountability and openness. The Attorney Gen-

eral says he is amenable. So will the Premier commit today to refer the Lobbyists Act to an all-party committee so that we can ensure there's public transparency and accountability in terms of lobbying of cabinet ministers? Will the Premier commit to that today?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** As the member well knows, there is a registration process under the statute, and there is a registry that's maintained through the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Any changes that could be done should be done in consultation with that office. In any event, if there are any breaches of protocol or legislation, then surely that's a matter for the member to bring up and complain.

[1440]

**L. Krog:** It is important to the people of British Columbia that they be satisfied that government is conducted in an open and transparent way. The Lobbyists Act is an important tool to assure British Columbians that government is behaving in an appropriate and transparent way. It is vitally important that that act be referred to an all-party committee of the Legislature.

Again I ask the Premier, as has been asked of him today already in this House: will he commit to referring the Lobbyists Act to an all-party committee of this Legislature?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** I want to remind the member opposite that it was this government that proclaimed that act. We brought that act into effect. The government is committed to being open and accountable and transparent. That's the objective of the legislation.

If there are weaknesses in the legislation, we're prepared to listen to them. We're prepared to revise the law if there are weaknesses in it. We haven't received any comments about any perceived or alleged weaknesses to that legislation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Nanaimo has a supplemental.

**L. Krog:** I just heard the Attorney General commit to this House that he is prepared to listen. There is no question that that unprecedented raid on the Legislative Assembly over two years ago has seriously impaired British Columbians' confidence in the government. So I repeat my question again to the Premier. In light of these circumstances, in light of the fact that his Attorney General is prepared to listen, will he now commit to referring the Lobbyists Act to an all-party committee of this Legislature?

**Hon. W. Oppal:** We are always prepared to listen to any issues and any evidence or any suggestions that will improve transparency and accountability. The fact is that the member draws a bow between what is going on in the courts now and this legislation. Again, I would remind the member — who is a lawyer and knows — that it's improper for me to comment on any

relationship he draws or any correlation between what is going on in a courtroom now and this legislation.

#### CHANGES TO FIRE COMMISSIONER OFFICE

**N. Macdonald:** In the 1980s the office of the fire commissioner was decentralized to recognize the nature of their work around the province. Training, reporting, fire investigation and fire inspection were available in every region of the province. Fire chiefs in the Kootenays have been clear to me that this grass-roots approach was something they appreciated and felt worked.

This government has moved practically everything in the office of the fire commissioner to Victoria. There are only four outside of Victoria to support 390 volunteer and professional fire departments.

My question is to the Solicitor General and the Minister of Public Safety. Who made the decision to centralize the office of the fire commissioner to Victoria, and what is the rationale?

**Hon. J. Les:** I appreciate the question from the member opposite. First of all, I should say that we are fortunate in British Columbia that we have some 400 fire departments that keep our communities safe.

The vast majority of the people who are part of these fire departments work on either a volunteer or a paid on-call basis. Those people are all supported by the office of the fire commissioner, which is an important office that supports the various fire departments across the country in the important aspects of training, information-sharing and investigation support. The reorganization that is going on will, in fact, ensure that fire safety officers will be available in more communities across the province and will centralize the administrative function of that office so that there will be an elimination of administrative duplication.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**N. Macdonald:** That explanation sounds innocuous and reasonable enough. The difficulty I have with it is this. In my area the people that are responsible for providing that service are the fire chiefs — many of them volunteers, as the minister has said.

[1445]

When I speak to the fire chief in Revelstoke, he thinks the reorganization is a poor idea. When I speak to the fire chief in Golden, he thinks the reorganization is a poor idea. When I speak to the volunteer fire chief in Nicholson, the volunteer fire chiefs in Edgewater, Radium, Invermere, Windermere, Canal Flats, Kimberley.... Every single one of my fire chiefs thinks the reorganization is a poor idea.

So the question I have for the minister: given that, why does he continue to have confidence in a plan that nobody on the ground feels is a good plan? And will he commit today to reconsider that plan and listen to the people who are actually doing the work in the field?

**Hon. J. Les:** First of all, I want to assure the member that the reorganization of the office of the fire commissioner is, in fact, going to provide more fire safety officers in more locations across the province. We think that is a good idea.

If the member wants to talk about resources — and I think he referred fondly to the 1980s — I think, as a matter of fact, in the 1980s the fire commissioner's office was well resourced and well deployed across the province. But unfortunately, the 1990s happened. It was during the 1990s that the office of the fire commissioner was reduced from 40 people down to 27, and its budget was cut by 20 percent.

**C. Evans:** The effects of climate change tend to be visited on people in the interior, and one of the effects is wildfire and the risk of wildfire. We've seen relatively catastrophic events in Kelowna and North Thompson and a narrowly missed major catastrophe in Cranbrook.

The office of the provincial fire commissioner employees, who used to work in the interior, used to serve a coordination role in assisting rural fire teams and volunteers to coordinate their work in a rational manner with those of urban fire crews and the Forest Service.

My question is for the Solicitor General. Now that the hon. minister responsible for evisceration of the fire commissioner's office has reduced the rural fire commissioner's staff from 16 to four and has changed their titles from commissioners to advisers, I wonder if it is the intention of the minister to also devolve the obligation and the liability for coordinating fire crews, in the event of wildfire, to the volunteers themselves, to the municipalities closest to the fire, to the Forest Service or the RCMP — or just whom.

**Hon. J. Les:** As a result of the reorganization of the fire commissioner's office, the fire commissioner will in fact be in a better position to support local fire departments across the province. That is in terms of the day-to-day activities of the various fire departments and certainly in the case of emergent conditions such as wildfires.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Nelson-Creston has a supplemental.

**C. Evans:** It's rare that we see such a monumental disconnect between the experience of people on the land and a minister down here in the pointy buildings. There are really two possibilities. One is that the staff that works for the hon. minister is telling him a different story than people are experiencing on the land, and the second is that the minister might be confused. I negate the possibility utterly that the minister would give us information that wasn't true.

If, however, we are going to eliminate training from rural communities.... In 2004 there were 30 opportunities to train volunteers all over the interior of British Columbia. Last year there were four. If we're going to

take away the opportunity for the province to train volunteer firefighters, will it be replaced by municipalities, or will volunteers have to pay for it themselves? Then, hon. minister, if there are mistakes made, will the liability rest on the private firefighters, on the municipality or on the local regional district? Where exactly will that liability rest now that it is being abandoned by the Solicitor General?

[1450]

**Hon. J. Les:** Well, I think the member is involved in a bunch of rhetoric, frankly, that is akin to fearmongering. The fire commissioner's office is going to continue to supply that important supportive role to the fire departments across the province, which includes training support, investigative support and the supply of information.

The people that work in the fire commissioner's office are all professionals. I am very proud of the work they do, as I am proud of all of the people who work in the various fire departments across the province. I think for that member to indicate that the support of the fire commissioner's office is being in any way diminished is flat wrong.

#### COPEMAN CLINIC INVESTIGATION

**D. Cubberley:** Recently the Minister of Health referred the Copeman clinic to the Medical Services Commission. An MSC decision to allow the clinic's annual fees for preferred access would create a how-to manual for every GP to start charging user fees.

It's an important decision. Has the minister now given direction to his ministry to present arguments against the Copeman clinic model to the Medical Services Commission?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** It appears the member is nursing some misapprehensions about how this particular statute works. They should be more familiar with the Medicare Protection Act; they were the government that put it in place. They were the government that put this in as the mechanism to resolve issues like the Copeman Centre through the Medical Services Commission. The commission is independent, professional, unbiased and very thorough in the work they do. I hope the member is not asking me to interfere in that work in any way.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Saanich South has a supplemental.

#### BILLING PRACTICES OF SURGICAL CLINIC IN ABBOTSFORD

**D. Cubberley:** I know the commission is independent. It's also true that it's been ten months, and the commission has not involved itself in the matter until the minister expressly asked it to, so its independence only began at that point.

Last week the Blaylock surgical centre, which is a new clinic in Abbotsford, announced it would be open-

ing its doors. By its own admission, this clinic will be charging patients for quick access to surgery and will also be billing MSP for those surgeries that are insured under the plan. That's double-billing, and it's forbidden by the Medicare Protection Act. Will the minister assure the House that he has communicated clearly to the Blaylock surgical centre that it is going to be breaking the law?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The member appears to have a fundamental misunderstanding with respect to how boards or commissions like the Medical Services Commission operate. It is always independent. It doesn't become independent at the moment that the ministry or the minister or anyone asks them to look into a matter. They are independent at all times. They are also capable, under their legislation.... They have the authority to look into the issue that they have been asked to address. They will do so in a thorough, professional, unbiased, independent and comprehensive way.

If the member is raising questions about Blaylock or other, I would be pleased to receive whatever information the member has with respect to that. I am not as familiar as I'm sure I will be with the Blaylock clinic. I'm glad to receive information and give some assessment to it, but I won't form my conclusions until I see that material.

#### LOBBYISTS REGISTRATION LEGISLATION

**J. Horgan:** My question is for the Attorney General.

Interjection.

**J. Horgan:** My question, then, would be for the Premier.

The Premier has had an opportunity to listen to discussion. He's had an opportunity to reflect on the points being made on this side of the House. I'm certain he's aware of the lack of confidence that the public is demonstrating in the Lobbyists Registration Act. I ask the Premier: will he commit to put that piece of legislation to an all-party committee?

[1455]

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I understand the politics at play here. The member is endeavouring to — improperly, in my view — link two totally different issues. You know, this is the government that introduced lobbyists registration legislation, and we're darn proud of it. This is the government that said we were going to conduct the business of public affairs in an open and transparent way, and that's what we've done.

When people genuinely come before us with suggestions about how to make that legislation better, we'll listen. But we're not going to listen to people who are trying to make political mileage in a very inappropriate way in this House today.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca has a supplemental.

**J. Horgan:** Far be it from the Minister of Labour to take politics and put it in front of an interesting public policy question.

Again, I pose my question to the Premier. The Premier has had an opportunity to reflect on the comments from this side of the House. He's had a couple of years to reflect on the amendments that were made to the act to protect the ministerial aides from oversight. Will the Premier recognize that this is a significant public issue requiring his immediate attention and put this bill to the all-party committee, so that the public can have confidence that the transparency that he preaches is a reality, not a myth?

**Hon. G. Campbell:** The opposition wants an opportunity to debate the Lobbyists Registration Act. They had that opportunity. That opportunity was done in this House previously. We talked about that opportunity. The NDP did not oppose the bill. They didn't oppose it in second reading; they didn't oppose it in the third reading. The NDP was there with us as we provided a lobbyists legislation act for all British Columbians, which was independent. Complaints could be made through the freedom-of-information commissioner. All of that is still available. They did not speak against the relevant section, which is section 28, in committee. It was approved without dissent.

In British Columbia we have a Lobbyists Registration Act, which is there to protect the public. We have a freedom-of-information commissioner, who is there to receive complaints. If the opposition has suggestions for how that act can be improved, they can submit them to the Attorney General for his consideration.

**B. Simpson:** I would remind the Premier that the two-member opposition, which he did not recognize as an official opposition, worked very hard to keep this government's feet to the fire during the term that they were in office.

However, legislation, when it's passed, is for a specific time, and it does not mean that we cannot learn from circumstances such as we've had to date. So my question again is to the Premier. Given that there's a lesson to be learned here, given that we now have a more robust and stronger opposition, will the Premier commit today to engage both sides...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**B. Simpson:** ...in a review of that legislation, in light of lessons learned? Will he commit today to an all-party review of that legislation?

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I don't think the member opposite should belittle the work that was done by previous New Democrat MLAs in this House. I can tell you they did an awful lot better job than he's doing.

As I've said to the opposition, the Lobbyists Registration Act was introduced using other models that

had been in place to protect the public interest in British Columbia. It remains there. Should the members of the opposition have some constructive suggestions on how that can be improved, I would recommend that they submit them to the Attorney General.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

The member for Cariboo North has a supplemental.  
[1500]

**B. Simpson:** I guess my question is very explicit. Why wouldn't the government include political aides in the lobbyists registry? That's an examination that could be undertaken by an all-party committee. Again to the Premier. There are lessons to be learned here; there are adjustments that can be made. Will the Premier commit to allow us to make them together, because that is, in fact, a constructive suggestion that we're making today?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** The bill that was introduced in the House dealt specifically with ministers and MLAs. As I've said earlier, if the opposition has some recommendations on how they might be able to improve the bill, they should submit them to the Attorney General.

More importantly, there is an underlying innuendo of allegation here. If there are allegations to be made, there is an avenue that those allegations can be made through — to the freedom-of-information commissioner. The important thing was that this was to be kept at arm's length from the political interference. The freedom-of-information commissioner is there at the service of the opposition and the public in British Columbia. If they've got allegations, I would suggest they make them. If they have constructive comments, more importantly, I would suggest they submit them to the Attorney General.

[End of question period.]

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, there are still members that have the floor.

### Petitions

**D. Routley:** I have a petition to submit from constituents regarding meat-processing regulations and the impact they are having on their businesses and livelihoods.

**J. Horgan:** I, too, have a petition, signed by 204 residents of the Cowichan Valley expressing to this

Legislature their concern about food security and the impact of meat-processing regulations.

**K. Conroy:** I actually have two petitions to present. One is a carry-on of the petition I presented last week — 121 more signatures to that petition, which now brings it to 4,054.

The other petition is actually from constituents throughout West Kootenay-Boundary, Kelowna and the Okanagan area also expressing concerns about the IHA. There are 805 signatures to that petition.

**M. Farnworth:** I table a petition with over 1,000 signatures collected in my riding of Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain. These people signing this petition are requesting that the Ministry of Health provide a lot more funding — more adequate funding — for long-term care beds.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I call Committee of Supply. For the information of members, we'll be discussing the estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands in Committee A and continuing with the estimates of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation in this chamber.

[1505]

### Committee of Supply

#### ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF ABORIGINAL RELATIONS AND RECONCILIATION (continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section B); S. Hawkins in the chair.

The committee met at 3:06 p.m.

On Vote 10: ministry operations, \$28,778,000 (continued).

**S. Fraser:** Welcome to the minister and his staff again. I think we're scheduled to try to finish up this evening. Luckily it's a late sitting. I have a number of MLAs who will be having some specific questions that I think I'll be trying to allow in as soon as possible. I would like to, if I could, maybe switch gears from where we were last week and just deal with a few specific issues, some in my constituency — so I would be speaking as an MLA — and others outside of the constituency that have come to my attention as critic for the ministry.

The ministry, I know, was involved in the last sitting.... We were dealing with issues in Ahousat, dealing with some of the suicide attempts that were happening there. It was a tragic situation, and there's been some progress made in that regard. I thank the minister and the ministry for acknowledging that and help-

ing to deal with some of that. I know they were supportive of getting some funding in place to try to deal with the crisis situation that was occurring there. There were some 60 attempts during the year in a population of 800. Definitely, the assistance was much needed, so thank you for that.

The issue is ongoing, and I know the Ministry of Children and Family Development has announced some further initiatives in that regard and specifically cited Ahousat. I just got that information today. Can the minister...? Does he have any further information or details on what that will mean for Ahousat — to remediate some of the situations that have led to these suicide attempts?

Interjections.

**The Chair:** Members, if I could just ask you to keep your conversations down. It's difficult to hear across the House for the members and the minister who are speaking.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I appreciate the member's question. I think all of us in this House can agree that there's really nothing more tragic than suicide, particularly when it involves youth. As the member has identified, there have been some challenges there in respect of the community of Ahousat. As the member rightly identified, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has been involved there; the Vancouver Island Health Authority has, through the Ministry of Health.

Unfortunately, I don't have specifics to answer the member's question. The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation plays more of a support role, a coordination role if asked. But the direct services are provided by those other two line ministries, particularly the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the member would be best to ask any specifics of that ministry.

[1510]

I can tell the member that certainly we all eagerly await the child and youth officer's report in respect of youth suicide within the aboriginal community so that we have an opportunity to learn what more we might undertake to ensure that we are addressing those very tragic situations and to ensure that it stops.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you for that, to the minister. Ahousat is not unique in a lot of ways for first nation communities in B.C. It's quite remote. Accessibility is limited. I know that there are some challenges that may not exist in other communities, first nations and non-first nations. I await the results of that report also.

But looking at the larger picture in Ahousat, for instance, when we get a situation where there is that level of suicide attempts, there seems to be an underlying problem of a lack of hope for people, for that number of youth, especially — not all youth, but for that number of people — to make that ultimate tragic action. Besides the issues of bringing remedial action and trying to deal with a symptom, there are the larger



issues around.... I'm sure that's what the new relationship is about and the implementation of Bill 11 and the trust that goes with it. I appreciate that.

But specifically with Ahousat, I met with the chief and councillors last week regarding some of their challenges, and they are, I think rightly so, trying to address some ground-level issues. The area needs housing, and they're working with.... I know with the federal government they've been trying to get through some of the red tape on acquiring land. District lot 363 has been in the works from Weyerhaeuser — the transfer of that land — for a long time.

This is largely a federal issue, but I did offer any support I could give, whether it's letters of support or any lobbying efforts I might do as an opposition critic. Is there a role that the minister might be able to play? Would he be willing to meet with the chief and council to try to see if there's some assistance that he can bring as a ministry towards bringing some fruition to this land transfer issue, for instance? It would be a great help to the community and, I think, go a long way towards healing some of that lack of hope for the community.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Certainly, I appreciate the member's.... What I think I heard was an acknowledgment that the response to issues of suicide in first nations communities is a complex issue and that "multi-faceted" is an understatement. I think the member has rightly identified that to truly address some of those challenges is unfortunately a long-term prospect in the sense that we have to provide a better foundation for hope in many of those communities. It really does take a comprehensive community response at the very local community and the broader provincial and federal communities so that we're seeing first nations see hope in looking to their future.

[1515]

Ultimately, that's what the new relationship is about. It's fundamentally what the transformative change accord that we signed between the province and the federal government and the leadership council last November is about, where we're looking at: how do we find hope in looking for educational opportunities for aboriginal people? How do we make improvements in health outcomes? How do we address the challenges around housing? How do we look for economic opportunity, and how do we assist first nations in pursuing economic opportunities so that they see that beacon of hope as they look to the future?

The member asked specifically in terms of additions to reserve lands and some of the process involved there. The member is correct that that is within the jurisdiction of the federal government. I certainly don't profess expertise in that process, but my understanding is that often there's a significant degree of consultation with local and regional governments — certainly with the provincial government, if it is provincial Crown land. I can tell the member that the province tries to be supportive of those applications, but ultimately it is within the purview of the federal government to move

that process along and make decisions around additions to reserve land.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you to the minister for that. Would it be acceptable, as the lead ministry in the new relationship and aboriginal relations and reconciliation, to ask that if the chief and council were seeking assistance from the minister and the ministry, they would be able to maybe arrange a meeting to deal with...? They've done a lot of work. I have a fairly lengthy and actually very complete interim report on the issues around trying to acquire this land.

There may or may not be a role for the ministry to play provincially here, but there's certainly at least a role in the sense that there's a request for assistance to try to get through a system. There's been acknowledgment by the ministry that there are capacity issues that have made it particularly challenging as far as having the resources to deal with some of this stuff at the federal level. Your advice as minister and your ministry staff may be able to advise chief and council on how to maybe get through this a little easier.

Would it be acceptable that I suggest to them that they could meet with the minister at some point and/or your staff to help advise on this regard?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Certainly I would encourage the member's constituents to send the information to us so that we can review it and determine what, if any, role there is for the province to play in moving the matter forward and assisting the federal government in making a decision.

One of the challenges the member may recognize in respect of this particular area of public policy is that there is a shared jurisdiction in many respects between the province and the federal government. While the province has a critical role to play and is very much interested in assisting first nations in realizing economic opportunity, what we need to ensure we are doing is, to the best of our ability, working together with first nations as well as the federal government to move those common objectives forward. I very much see our role as being one to move those common objectives forward.

[1520]

**S. Fraser:** Hon. Chair, I jumped the gun. I thank the minister for that. I will pass on that information to Chief Atleo and let him know that the information can go forward to the ministry and that, hopefully, they could advise on how best to proceed if there are particular problems that I don't have the expertise on, which maybe your staff would be able to help with.

Still dealing with some issues in Ahousat, which is the largest first nations community in my constituency, there are some particularly difficult situations that are not unique to remote first nations communities. In Ahousat, Chief Atleo also pointed out an issue around a little ten-year-old girl who was born with Usher syndrome. I was unfamiliar with the syndrome. I raised it with the Minister of Children and Family Development who acknowledged that there is a problem — not just

in the province, but across the country. Sometimes there's a disconnect between the provincial and federal governments as far as children on reserve with disabilities that need specific help. Yet, because they're on reserve, it is often designated a federal issue. But because of grey areas, it often gets shifted back to the province, and it ends up that the children with the disabilities are the ones that suffer.

In this case there are people with intervener status at the school that have made some significant reports on the needs for this child that are not being met and the needs for the community and the family involved that are not being met. They're running into a stone wall on this. This, again, is not unique. What I was hoping is that the minister and the ministry could play some sort of a role here in trying to at least acknowledge a problem and trying to work towards finding a solution to filling in these gaps so the children are not at risk here.

If I may, I've been working with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. They've been doing a huge amount of work on this, and I've been at some meetings in the province. There are significant problems provincially where, because of this confusion of jurisdiction, we're seeing children with disabilities on reserve not getting the resources they need or not having the ability to go home to be with their families.

There's a definite disconnect, and it's a constitutional one. There was a little boy that had a.... Jordan is the name of the principle: Jordan's Principle. The Caring Society has a principle which I think is relevant to the ministry and that should be considered as the ministry makes decisions around the needs of communities in trying to address the disparity that exists in aboriginal communities. It's a very short statement, but it's very powerful. It says: "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit under the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability."

This is reaffirmed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, yet these disparities exist. You know, provincial governments — whoever they may be, or whatever political stripes — can't just say, "Well, it's not our responsibility; it's a federal responsibility," because the children then suffer. It's the responsibility of any provincial government to protect the children in the province. If it's a loophole that means they're not getting that protection or those services, that should be closed. If it's still not legally the responsibility of the province, if it's a federal responsibility, I believe the province should step forward and take this one head-on and make sure the children aren't the ones to suffer, and then they deal with the federal government on this issue.

Would the minister care to comment? Is there any role for the ministry to play in trying to maybe help the Ministry of Children and Family Development try to deal with this disparity? I will work as an opposition

critic in a non-partisan way to try to help in any way I can, too, but it is a real issue, and children are the ones who are suffering.

[1525]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I thank the member for his question. I'm not going to comment on the specifics of two very specific cases the member referred to because I don't have enough background information to know exactly what's going on there.

What I can tell the member is this: my experience is that there is a general recognition that the historic sort of retreat into a jurisdictional argument is wholly unacceptable and in no way serves first nations and aboriginal people well. There's a recognition of that fact at the provincial level, and my experience is that there is a recognition of that fact at the federal level.

What we have seen from the first ministers meeting, the transformative change accord, and certainly in the context of the new relationship, is that we are all committed to trying to break through those jurisdictional barriers and focus on the people that we all serve. Whether we're a first nations leader, whether we're a provincial leader, whether we're a federal leader, we actually have people that require services, and we have to focus on ensuring they get to those services.

Now, as the member will recognize, that's easy for me to stand up here and say. It's difficult to get it into effect on the ground. But there is a commitment across government, within the Ministry of Children and Family Development, within the Ministry of Health, as coordinated by Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, to be working, primarily through the leadership council, to better engage the federal government, and Health Canada in particular, to say: "You know what? It doesn't matter whether you're on reserve or off reserve; you're entitled to the same basket of services in the province, and we better collectively as governments ensure that you're getting those services."

That is much of the discussion that is evolving from the first ministers meeting, and I'm optimistic and will continue to work towards breaking down those jurisdictional barriers that the member refers to. Certainly, I welcome the member's continued input where he sees those barriers arising so that we can try and tackle them head-on.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you to the minister for that. I very much appreciate it, and I will be forwarding you that specific case from Ahousat again. I'll be contacting the chief and council and letting them know that your office is being apprised of the situation and is willing to look at finding a solution there.

I hear what the minister's saying, and I think there has to be a lot more push. The acknowledgment was already there in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it still didn't turn into action. There were still children suffering, and there are hundreds across, especially, western Canada that are still falling through the cracks there. Much work needs to be done, and I appreciate the minister's statements in this regard.

Switching gears a little bit; just some local issues again. The road to Huu-ay-aht-Bamfield. We have a significant first nations community; we have a significant non-aboriginal community. I'm talking access. I'll raise this in the Transportation estimates too. However, I need to ask questions about how the ministry can play a role or not in issues around critical access to first nations communities. In this case, I'll just keep it regarding first nations communities.

There have been a lot of incidents across the province now of, basically, logging roads having very serious accidents on them because of the level of maintenance or the level that they've been developed at. This is a community.... This is a lifeline. This is where children from that community use this road to take long journeys just to get education, which is, of course, something we all hold near and dear, and it's part of the five great goals.

When I try to deal with the issue of that road not being up to public standards, the response I get from the ministry — again, I'm not asking you to comment on this, because I'll deal with that in those estimates — is that it's actually a private logging road. The way the contract is laid out is it only has to be kept to a standard that's acceptable for industry. There is public money, though, going towards that, but it seems to specifically not accommodate the public needs.

I do not fault this government on such contracts. It could be oversight. It could have been another government. I don't even know that. However, what I do know is that the situation has got way worse in the last couple of years. The road is scary to drive on, and I made a point of doing it myself in the relatively good times. This road is not kept up to any standard that a regular car can drive on. I shudder to think that school children have to travel on it and high school students have to travel on this on a regular basis.

[1530]

I do not believe this is in keeping with the new relationship at any level, because I think it could unduly affect the safety of the students involved. So it's an issue that I don't have an answer for. But is there a role, as this ministry and this minister take the lead on the new relationship, which is about a new relationship trying to address some of these problems that have maybe not been addressed over the last few years...? Can this ministry take some sort of a role here, either in an educational role with another minister, another ministry, or to influence remedying the situation or at least improving it to make it more acceptable for first nations and non?

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I thank the member for raising the question. As the member rightly points out, this is by no means a new issue. It is one that first nations communities around the province have struggled with for a number of years — many, many years in some cases.

Certainly, in respect of specific examples, I would encourage the member to raise those with the ministers responsible for the specific roads, which in some cases will be the Minister of Forests and Range and in some cases will be the Minister of Transportation.

The member raises the issue in the context of the new relationship, and what I can tell the member is that the new relationship has actually provided us a mechanism, a vehicle to start and identify what some of these issues are, whether they're issues that are impacting many first nations communities, or one community but with a very significant impact. It gives us a bit of a forum to try and bring issues that may have a cross-government relevance to the fore so that we can start and figure out how we address those things.

It is not something that we can address overnight or sort of dictate on the fly a policy of how you are going to address it, but as the member rightly recognizes, there are issues in terms of transportation links to first nations communities, and it is something that there does need to be considerably more work around.

**S. Fraser:** Thanks to the minister for that. The minister's right. I believe that there are so many cross-jurisdictions in dealing with the new relationship.... Whereas this may be a Ministry of Transportation main issue or Ministry of Forests and Range, it's also Education, because this is a critical link in the education system for the children and the students on the reserve and in the community of Bamfield.

Considering the five great goals, it is germane to this ministry. I don't expect any miracles here, but I will hold the minister to acknowledging the problem and that there is an interministerial link here to deal with the problems. I will probably be raising that to your colleague when we go up to Transportation very soon. I have already been through the Ministry of Education, so I have touched on that there also.

On another specific issue, the Tseycum Coast Salish have been involved in a repatriation, I'm sure you're aware, of the ancestral remains. They're having some significant international challenges trying to get back some of the ancestral remains, which are, of course, very important, very significant culturally and spiritually. They have been asking for help, and it has certainly been getting press.

[1535]

They have been having to deal with, I think, Chicago and New York. There are significant ancestral remains that are spread out in areas that they're trying to get repatriated. I'm wondering what role the minister can play here. There are significant costs associated with this sort of thing, and there's certainly an administrative cost in trying to deal with the levels of bureaucracy involved with trying to get these important ancestral remains or artifacts, in some cases, returned as they should be. Has the ministry budgeted anything to deal with such issues, as in the Tseycum situation?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The short answer to the member's question is that we don't have any current

involvement or any particular expertise within the ministry in terms of assisting with the repatriation of remains or cultural or heritage artifacts. A number of first nations, as the member will know, have found success themselves in pursuing those paths, but the province hasn't played a significant role in that.

I can tell the member that in the context of the new relationship, certainly one of the primary discussions around the whole concept of reconciliation is what we can do further and how should we prioritize what we do around the celebration of first nations culture and heritage within the province. Certainly, in that context we're likely to have more discussion about issues of repatriation of remains as well as artifacts.

I can also tell the member that in the context of that discussion we'll always be limited somewhat in our ability to do everything that is asked. To date, as the member may know, we've been trying to focus some of our resources on really developing a plan as to how we can better celebrate aboriginal culture and heritage in the province. Part of that was some of the funding announced last Friday around the preservation of aboriginal languages. We announced that an additional million dollars will be provided to the First Peoples Heritage, Language and Culture Council to assist them in the incredible work they've already been doing with first nations around the province in protecting, maintaining and, ideally, enhancing the knowledge of first nations language. That is a rich part of British Columbia's heritage and certainly one that we're interested in promoting and protecting.

[1540]

As with many things — I think, particularly, many things in the context of the new relationship — there is considerably more discussion that we need to have with first nations around how we set our priorities on what we can do and how we move forward with that. Certainly, that is a conversation and work still to be done.

**S. Fraser:** I agree with the minister's assessment. I believe the repatriation of ancestral remains is almost synonymous with the ministry's name: Relations and Reconciliation. Reconciliation would be about the repatriation of the ancestral remains. I think that's pretty much what the ministry's namesake is about — as in language too.

So it is not an isolated case. I know this came before the public and the ministry and the government prior to the budget, so I am disappointed. I know others are disappointed that there has not been any acknowledgment of that through the budget process, that there has not been anything tangible put on the table to try to deal with this. I do not believe it's reasonable to expect an individual, or a small first nation in this case, to be able to affect everything that's necessary to seek this return of the ancestral remains or artifacts.

Again, I note that the minister acknowledged this is an issue that is outstanding. Hopefully, it will be dealt with in a future budget. At the same time, I would ask the minister.... If a first nation — in this case, the Tsey-

cum — has a formal request for help on this, and they have located the remains and opened a dialogue with where they're being held, surely there is a role in the interests of reconciliation to get these things back. Surely, since that is the name of this new ministry, the ministry has a role to play here this term, not maybe through next budget. Can the minister comment on that, please?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The role that the member talks about is not one that the province has played in the past, and it's not one that we're currently budgeted for. We have had some limited involvement in terms of looking at the return of artifacts to first nations within the treaty process context. But those typically are artifacts in the care and control of the province, so we're in a good position to enter into agreements to protect those artifacts and return them to a particular first nation. In some cases there, we've also tried to assist in getting artifacts from outside the province.

[1545]

As we have embarked upon the new relationship and as we're working more closely with first nations, one of the challenges — and the member may be sympathetic to this — is that we find there is a great long list of things that we haven't done in the past, which we could do in the future. The challenge in that is that you have to start setting your priorities, in terms of where new investments are going to be made and the work that's going to be done.

We are trying to set those priorities, together with the First Nations Leadership Council, in the context of the discussions we're having around the new relationship. Some of that priority-setting certainly is what resulted in the establishment of the New Relationship fund and the allocation of \$100 million to build capacity within first nations communities.

What the new relationship does is provide us a forum to discuss the issues that are critical to first nations, and in the context of that forum, quite frankly, I think we all recognize that we need to set some priorities. We're working closely and need to work more closely with first nations in terms of setting.... You know, what are the most critical priorities for first nations as we move ahead in evolving this relationship, rather than the province deciding unilaterally what the priorities should be?

As I say, that's the type of process that led to establishment of the need to build capacity. I can tell the member that as we continue to do the work with the leadership council and continue to hear from first nations more generally around issues of reconciliation — around pursuit of the matters that have been identified specifically by the leadership council and led to the transformative change accord, so around the need to improve health outcomes, education outcomes, housing, economic opportunities and to build better relationships — we're going to be listening very intently to what first nations tell us should be the priorities in doing that.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you for that, minister. I very much respect and acknowledge the leadership council in the role they've played here. They've been a wonderful example to all British Columbians in cooperation and leadership.

Having said that, there are individual first nations where the Chief and council will come to, I would assume, and can still access the ministry and the minister, because the government-to-government relationship.... An elected Chief councillor and council certainly represent an individual first nation. That isn't being lost in this process, is it?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** That relationship is not being lost at all. I guess what I should have made more clear in my previous answer — given the specifics of the member's question around repatriation of remains — is that if a first nation approaches us looking for assistance in repatriating remains or other artifacts, we don't currently have a program or a funding pool in place to assist with that. We're not in a position to deal with those requests on an individual, case-by-case basis.

If that is identified as a priority in our discussions with first nations generally, I think we need to be working with the leadership council to identify how we develop a policy framework around that, as we do on a number of fronts where it's first nations that are most directly impacted. And in developing those policy frameworks, part of that exercise with the leadership council will be: how do we set the priorities in terms of what first nations would like to see evolve in our relationship between the Crown and first nations?

As the member will recognize — and this isn't unique to first nations or any other group in society — there are always limits to being able to do everything. We need to be able to establish priorities in terms of how available funding is going to be allocated. What I'm suggesting is that in doing that, when it's funding that directly assists first nations, we should actually engage them in setting those priorities.

[1550]

**S. Fraser:** Thank you, minister, for that. The repatriation of artifacts and ancestral remains has been an issue for a long time. So with a new relationship, that is an outstanding issue that I believe has to be addressed, as does the language issue. The government has chosen to start working in that regard. Both those issues have been on the table for a long time. One was picked, and the other one has not been dealt with so far. I believe that's a lacking that needs to be corrected, certainly, through consultation with the leadership council and also with individual nations. I hope that will be rectified in the interests of reconciliation.

If we could touch on that, just following a little trail here.... The \$1 million that was announced at the First Citizens Forum towards education — where is that budgeted from?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** That \$1 million is from the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation's '05-06 budget.

**S. Fraser:** Every year there is \$600,000 for projects that is already allotted directly towards aboriginal languages. Is this in addition to that, or is it an extra \$400,000 to bring it up to a million?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** We provide \$1 million each year to the First Peoples Heritage, Language and Culture Council, of which \$600,000 goes specifically towards language programs. This \$1 million announced on Friday is in addition to that \$600,000. It is all additional money available to the council for language preservation.

**S. Fraser:** That will be administered through the First Peoples Heritage, Language and Culture Council?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Yes.

**S. Fraser:** I'll switch gears here a little bit. As far as I can tell, slightly over half of the budget is going towards treaty. Am I in the ballpark there?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The member is correct. Certainly, well over half of the ministry's overall budget is dedicated towards negotiations. That's not just limited to treaty; it's broadly negotiations.

**S. Fraser:** Would that portion also include Douglas treaty negotiations?

[1555]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** There aren't negotiations with a group of first nations who are, collectively, the Douglas treaty bands. There's not a set of negotiations in that context. There are, however, ongoing treaty negotiations with individual first nations who may also be a party to a Douglas treaty.

**S. Fraser:** There is the Douglas treaty initiative, which I certainly heard about when I was in the interior, and I know the ministry has been approached on that initiative. Is that included in the Douglas treaty negotiations of the various first nations that it's applicable to?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The Douglas treaties are a group of treaties on lower Vancouver Island. I think I know what the member is referring to in terms of a reference to the interior. There are a series of specific claims that different first nations have put forward in the interior, which are primarily a claim in respect of the federal government. On some, on a case-by-case basis, the province is involved as well and is certainly prepared to be involved on a negotiation-type basis, but they're primarily within the purview of the federal government. Beyond the context of the B.C. Treaty Commission process and the first nations who have

chosen to take advantage of the opportunity to negotiate treaties through the B.C. Treaty Commission, we're not involved in specific treaty negotiations.

I hope that's helpful to the member.

**S. Fraser:** It's the start of being helpful, but I'm being mindful of my colleagues. I'm going to hand the control on this one over to my colleague to my right. I'm just going to let him go for a little while. There are a number of different MLAs that have some questions, including one of your own, so far. We'll be trying to schedule all of them in today, if that's all right. That doesn't leave me a whole lot of time.

**H. Lali:** I think my colleague from Port Alberni meant I was geographically to the right of him and not philosophically. And I'm certainly not to the right of the minister — let's put it this way — geographically or philosophically.

I want to ask the minister about poverty and unemployment on aboriginal reserves. I was wondering if the minister could elaborate in terms of what his ministry is doing in concrete terms to make sure that poverty and unemployment will be eliminated on reserve.

[1600]

You know, we hear the Liberal government across the way time after time brag about how great things are in British Columbia, how low the unemployment rate is and how there's a new era of prosperity in this country. But when you look across so much of British Columbia, especially rural British Columbia, people aren't feeling that. The latest Ipsos-Reid poll said 52 percent of the people are not feeling the effects of any of that — that obviously people in the upper-income levels are, but people in the lower- and middle-income levels are not.

When you look at aboriginal reserves.... I think on several occasions I have stated in this House that I have the greatest number of aboriginal bands and tribal councils of any constituency in the province. I have 27 distinct and separate bands. When you look across not just the first nations in my constituency but first nations all across this province, it's like they're living in a different world, because the unemployment rates are so high and poverty levels are so high.

I was wondering if the minister could elaborate on what specifically he or his ministry is doing or is prepared to do to make sure that people who live on reserves — aboriginal people in this province — are getting their fair share of the economic pie and on what specific programs he has put in place or, as the minister, is willing to put in place to make sure that those poverty and unemployment levels drop to the same standard as they are in the rest of British Columbia.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I appreciate the member's question, because he identifies, quite frankly, the same thing we identified as one of the primary reasons for pursuing the new relationship with first nations. That is that when we look at the socioeconomic status of first nations across British Columbia relative to the rest

of the population, there is a glaring and shameful gap that has been there for generation after generation, year after year, decade after decade, through governments of all political stripes. We need to find a way to close that gap.

Certainly, we welcome the members on that side of the House to participate with us in identifying how we close that gap. It's why we're working closely with the First Nations Leadership Council to find a better path forward where we're actually identifying what some of the solutions are. We're doing that together and listening to first nations when they identify some of the solutions.

There are things we can do in the short term, but I think the unfortunate reality is that this is going to take a number of years to truly close that gap in a meaningful and sustainable way. Part and parcel of that is certainly a focus on education, where we're working very hard. I think that if we look at some of the trends over the last ten years — and the last few years in particular — those are positive in terms of aboriginal student graduation rates from high school, aboriginal student participation rates in post-secondary education. The trends are good. So those, over time, will help build economic capacity — which, again, is the foundation for providing sustainable employment in first nations communities, just like it is in non-first nations communities.

We're focused on looking for additional economic opportunities, looking at how first nations better participate in some of the opportunities that the bounty of natural resources provides in this province — whether that's in new opportunities in forestry, whether that's an ability to participate in new mining activity that might come on line. All of those are discussions that we're having in the context of the new relationship with the First Nations Leadership Council.

The Aboriginal Tourism Association has come forward with an aboriginal tourism strategy that we're working with them to develop a business plan around and to support.

[1605]

I think we need to look at where first nations have had particular success. Certainly, the member will be familiar with the Osoyoos Indian Band and some of the great success they've had on an economic front in terms of different projects within their territory, including the very successful Nk'Mip winery and golf course and other developments around that.

There's a real current and future opportunity, I think, in aboriginal tourism in many parts of the province. We're working with the Aboriginal Tourism Association to try and figure out how to develop that — not because we have all the expertise but rather because we want to listen to the people within the aboriginal community that have been successful and figure out how we assist that success in growing.

A critical part, and I would suggest the most important part, of the New Relationship fund that was established just last week — that \$100 million fund — is to build the capacity within first nations communities that

will enable those communities to have economic success, because it's that success that is going to alleviate the poverty that has been there year over year over year for far, far too long. We need to build that foundation to actually eliminate the poverty and unemployment that is all too pervasive on reserve. That's by way of introduction.

In terms of some specifics that the member had asked about, we have an aboriginal business and entrepreneurship skills training program that we've been funding to try and build capacity in that area. That's co-funded with Western Economic Diversification and the Ministry of Small Business and Revenue. That began in December of 2004. That provides a series of training sessions around entrepreneurship to try and engage the aboriginal community in those opportunities.

I can tell the member, actually, that I had the opportunity just a couple of weeks ago to attend an aboriginal youth entrepreneurship symposium in Vancouver that brought together aboriginal youth from across Canada. It was incredible — the energy and the optimism in that room looking forward. What we need to do is build on that and make sure that those individuals are taking their ideas back to their home communities and finding a way to build those opportunities in different places around the province.

Certainly through the first citizens fund, the ministry continues to provide some business development support in terms of a business loan program to provide loans to first nations businesses that are trying to get up and off the ground, and see those grow. There's the Native Economic Development Advisory Board that provides advice to government in terms of how to use the funding within the first citizens fund to better promote business development for first nations, both on and off reserve — again, to try and provide some of the foundation for providing future opportunities.

I think it's fair to say that the reality of trying to address that pervasive challenge of poverty and unemployment in first nations communities in many parts of the province is really a case of looking at the physical environment that surrounds that first nation and looking at opportunities for them to participate in economic opportunity that arises from that physical environment. It stems from connecting first nations to the Internet through expanding broadband connectivity, which we're doing, to ensure that they're better connected to the outside world and can take advantage of potential economic opportunities that flow from that. That's the one layer.

The other layer is the education piece, which is fundamental to being able to take advantage of the opportunities that might arise.

[1610]

**H. Lali:** The minister mentioned something in his answer about the New Relationship fund and capacity-building, and I'll defer that for a moment because I'm going to talk about it a little later.

In this instance I want to point the minister to a Stats Canada study that just came out in March 2006. It

showed that of any province, child poverty is the highest in British Columbia. Depending on which figures you look at, it could be 20 percent or 25 percent. Let's take the case, if it's a lower figure, of around 20 percent. If you look at aboriginal reserves....

Now, that 20 percent means that child poverty in British Columbia is 41 percent above the Canadian average. If you go to a first nations reserve, you'll find that child poverty rates are even more than double that. In other words, they're more than 100 percent higher than they are in the Canadian average. The only province that even comes close to it is Newfoundland, which was once considered the poor child of Confederation. In British Columbia when you see those child poverty rates, they're even worse than they are in Newfoundland.

I want the minister to concentrate a little bit on, again.... I appreciate the answer that he gave me with the number of processes that are in place and am hoping that it'll bear fruit in the near future so that aboriginal people can get on with their lives and enjoy the same educational and employment opportunities as the rest of the population. Having said that, again, I point to not just the poverty and unemployment rates, in general, on reserve but, specifically, in terms of child poverty. They're the highest anywhere in Canada.

I would like to ask the minister.... When it comes to training and apprenticeships, obviously, the aboriginal people don't have those same opportunities. To begin with, aboriginal people start from — on the economic side of things — a base that is a lot lower than there is in mainstream British Columbia. So in order to put them onto the same level, what kind of programs, specifically, is this minister pushing for so that aboriginal people can compete on the same level? When you look at it, where...? Actually, I'll leave it at that and then come back and ask the subsequent question to the minister.

Basically, I'm looking for specifics from the minister as to what he is doing to convince his government to put in place some programs for training so that those who do not go on to a college or a university education at least have some training so they can get into the field of their choice and achieve some employment opportunities.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I think the member has identified an area where there are huge opportunities out in front of aboriginal youth, in particular, as they look to the future and look at what their interests are and as we look at the sort of pending skills demand. There are just huge opportunities for increased participation of the aboriginal community in the employment force and the consequent advantages of that in reducing poverty and, certainly, reducing unemployment.

[1615]

In terms of specific initiatives around training and apprenticeship, obviously, aboriginal people are able to participate in the range of programs that are available to the general population, whether those are offered through the Industry Training Authority or our post-

secondary institutions. Certainly, I know that's not what the member is specifically looking for.

There are a number of other programs that we're supportive of that, although they are available to the general population, find that the majority of their participants are aboriginal. An example of that would be the BladeRunners program that I know the member is aware of and very supportive of. I think we can all agree it has been a very strong program that is now being expanded from Vancouver to other regions as well. We found that aboriginal youth, in particular, benefit from that.

The B.C. Construction Association, in partnership with the Industry Training Authority, has had some considerable success in attracting aboriginal people into positions within the construction trades and in building their skills over time and some of them then pursuing apprenticeships. They're not big, flashy government programs, but they're on-the-ground programs that are actually bringing results as those skills are needed in the community.

There's also, certainly and fundamentally, the New Relationship fund and the reality that the fund — it's \$100 million, as the member well knows — will provide significant tools to pursue a range of potential skills training opportunities for people in first nations right across the province. It is, at its very heart, a skills training tool, because that's what capacity-building is all about: gaining those skills.

Rather than government actually directing how exactly those dollars will be spent, that will be determined through this board of directors that controls the fund, the majority of whom are appointed by first nations. So they can identify where the critical skills needs are, where the demands are from within first nations communities, and decide where it is that they want to focus dollars to be allocated towards skills training and what types of skills training to build capacity that supports the sustainability of those communities.

I think, more than anything, that \$100 million fund is going to be key to building the better future that I know the member seeks for the first nations that he represents and certainly the others around the province.

**H. Lali:** In a previous answer, the minister talked about opportunities in the mining and the forest industries as well. In this recent answer the minister said that aboriginal people can participate in the programs that are available. That's true. A significant number of aboriginal people do participate in these programs. I applaud the government on that.

But once they are involved in these training programs, in order to get a job in business or in the public sector, it's a different reality. Even when aboriginal people have the same qualifications as non-aboriginal people, and even in the instances where they're more qualified as well, those employment opportunities are still not there, because employers are not willing to hire aboriginal people when they're competing against

those people who are non-aboriginal. I guess what I'm saying is that there's a lot of discrimination that takes place based on, basically, the differences of race. It's shameful that it happens, but it happens all over British Columbia. It doesn't matter whether the employer is white, red, yellow or brown. That discrimination still takes place, and aboriginal people are denied those opportunities.

Now, the minister had said that there are opportunities in mining and also in forestry because of some of the processes that are already in place. Can the minister assure this House that in his dialogues with industry, mining and forestry, if it hasn't already happened...? Those industries provide decent, well-paying, family-supporting jobs. Those are the kinds of jobs that aboriginal people need to get out of the economic downward cycle that they're presently involved in.

[1620]

Can the minister assure this House, if it hasn't already been done, that he will sit down with those major industries and actually work with them to develop programs whereby aboriginal people can get access to those entry-level jobs — perhaps in numbers that are greater than their population, because right now they are very, very underrepresented, especially in mining — so that at some point in time the disparity will be levelled so aboriginal people can have those opportunities — both in terms of the workers' jobs in the forest and the mining industries as well as those entry-level jobs, and even perhaps in some of the management level jobs in both those industries? Those are big industries, big sectors, in rural British Columbia.

My focus isn't just about rural British Columbia, but because I happen to live there, it's my duty to present that on behalf of rural British Columbians. What I would like to see, as I pointed out — and I need an assurance from the minister — is that he work with these big industries in mining and forestry to ensure that as new jobs become available, aboriginal people will get access to those — and also in management, so they can actually start being treated on the same level as they as they should be, as the mainstream community is.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I appreciate the member's question. It's an easy one to answer. I can assure the member I will do exactly that, because it's exactly what I have been doing. More often than not, it's actually at the invitation of a number of industry associations, all of whom are expressing considerable support for the new relationship and emphasizing their desire to work more closely with first nations around the province.

We've seen exceptional leadership by the Association for Mineral Exploration. It used to be the B.C. and Yukon Chamber of Mines; they changed their name just to confuse me. They've put out a guidebook to guide their members who are involved in mineral exploration as to how to better work with first nations around the province, including opportunities to train and hire members of first nations communities. It is an excellent guidebook, one that any industry would be



wise to read and review. So they're being very proactive and looking for opportunities to work with first nations.

We've seen a similar approach by the B.C. Business Council that has been very supportive of the new relationship. Representatives of the council have met with the First Nations Leadership Council on a number of occasions to talk about how the business community can better support this new era in relations — between first nations and the government, certainly, but really first nations and everybody else in the province. We all are pursuing the same goal of ensuring that we close those gaps and that first nations and aboriginal people in the province have the same opportunities that all of us should have to take part in economic developments in the province.

So while one part of it, as the member has rightfully mentioned, the opportunity to work at all levels within an organization — whether that's in the forest industry, the mining industry or in a tourism organization — is important in an employment context, what we also want to see, and are seeing, are companies that are controlled and owned by aboriginal people and first nations having the opportunity to participate in economic development.

[1625]

I mentioned earlier the opportunities to participate in economic development around forestry or mining. There we're talking about direct participation not necessarily as employees but, in fact, as the people who may control a business that is pursuing those opportunities. That's in the context of the new relationship, where we're looking at how a first nations community can be effectively involved in a mining project that they're interested in that's within their traditional territory. What are the avenues to potential involvement there? When we look at forestry, how do we provide first nations effective access to fibre and some of the opportunities that arise when you have access to that fibre?

There are a host of things already happening, and I can assure the member 100 percent that in all the conversations I have, I am consistently looking for ways that we can better work with first nations to pursue those opportunities. In all the conversations I have with various members of different business associations and industry associations, the message I am hearing back very clearly is that they are looking for opportunities to better work with first nations and aboriginal people. It gives me a great sense of optimism for the future.

As the member will recognize, we must always be vigilant in looking for situations where discrimination arises and dealing with those effectively. My experience in the portfolio over the last number of months has been that there is just an incredible sense of goodwill and desire to better work and build better relationships between aboriginal people and first nations and the non-aboriginal community throughout the province.

**H. Lali:** I am heartened by his response that he's already on top of the issue of working with the forest

and the mining industries on programs to try to get aboriginal participation in those economic opportunities.

I know the minister is aware that the higher the financial status or the economic circumstances of a community, the less social problems exist, whether they're alcohol and drug abuse, violence, even teen-aged pregnancies, suicides and a number of these kind of things. One of the problems is that because the economic circumstances of people on reserve are so much lower than the rest of society, we're seeing those kinds of problems that I just mentioned are higher, and they're as a direct result of their economic circumstances. I know the minister knows this.

When I compare aboriginal children.... We talked about poverty in British Columbia and on reserve. When you look at aboriginal children.... They go to school, and they see non-aboriginal students who are there — children that are there because their economic circumstances are better and their economic standards are higher. These aboriginal people are not able to participate fully in the kinds of activities that the non-aboriginal kids are able to. So there are a lot of problems that emanate out of there in terms of the aboriginal children's relationship with their aboriginal parents simply because they can't afford to be able to have their children participate in extracurricular activities.

These cost money, as we know, whether they're in-school or extracurricular activities — recreational activities out of school in terms of the programs that are available in communities, whether it's ballet or hockey or kids participating in softball or arts and cultural kinds of activities. They feel left out. So this whole cycle, this downward cycle, this spiral we've seen in society in terms of the problems that exist, is magnified that much more for aboriginal children.

Of course, we have the same problem, as well, with the folks from poor families who are non-aboriginal, but the focus here is aboriginal children. So obviously, they get involved in activities that will get them on the wrong side of the law as well.

[1630]

Obviously, we as a society and as a government need to collectively take responsibility to make sure that aboriginal people are able to elevate their economic circumstances to the same level as non-aboriginal people.

I want to specifically talk now about some of these kinds of programs. Over a number of years, since the core review was done by the Liberal government, a lot of services were cut, whether it was alcohol- and drug-related counselling programs, on reserve and off reserve, or legal aid — most of the aboriginal people who used the legal system depended on legal aid — and a number of other areas as well.

I want to ask the minister: in terms of dealing with some of these social problems, what kinds of programs does the ministry have in place — or work with other ministries to put in place — that will deal with drug- and alcohol-related issues, teenage pregnancies on reserve, the high rate of suicide and incarceration, and also, access to health care?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I appreciate that the member, in the beginning of his question, sort of acknowledged the interconnectedness between a host of issues that are at play when we look at the broad issue of poverty. The member mentioned some of them. We look at poverty, which impacts health outcomes, which has an impact on the opportunity to pursue economic development. All of those are interrelated with education and the foundation that it provides to alleviate poverty, which in turn, improves health.

It's by no coincidence that the elements that have been identified, both in the new relationship and in the transformative change accord, are education, health, economic opportunity, housing — then all of them brought together by the need to build better relationships. Those five things together truly are the foundation for building a stronger community within first nations, and a community that is going to be vibrant.

Again, better support, better education, better health, the pursuit of economic opportunities — all of those things.... Really, the work that underlies the answers to the member's specific question is at the heart of what we are doing around the transformative change accord — across government provincially but, equally importantly, in concert with the leadership council — to identify: "Okay, what is the work that we need to do, looking forward, to close those gaps?"

The member's asked for some specifics. I'm not going to be able to provide them to the member, because the reality of the situation is that specific programs are delivered by a host of other line ministries provincially. If the member has specific questions around health care with respect to a first nation community or to aboriginal people, or around education or services delivered by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, he's better to ask those questions of those specific ministers.

The role of the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is to work across government and in partnership with the leadership council to identify: where are the service gaps? Where are services being provided, but not terribly effectively? Where are we not working terribly well in concert with the federal government when we get to this on reserve-off reserve jurisdictional challenge that we confront?

[1635]

How do we, then, remove the existing barriers and address the existing service gaps so that over the course of time, in concert with both the federal government and first nations, we actually start to see progress on narrowing these gaps that we've all identified that we want to narrow in education, health, housing, economic opportunity? And how do we measure our progress so that two years from now, five years from now, we can actually tell whether we're having any success in doing that and can readjust the plans that we've put in place if we're not having success? I think it's going to require continuous review and adjustment

if we are going to make progress in closing those gaps over the next ten years.

**H. Lali:** I recognize — and the minister has actually pointed it out as well — that a lot of these kinds of programs are delivered by the line ministries. Perhaps I can reword this question and ask a different question.

In terms of the kinds of items I mentioned — whether it's drug and alcohol counselling, teenage pregnancies, family counselling, transition homes, suicide prevention types of programs and any other type of program that deals with some of the issues and problems that arise in society and in aboriginal society, in particular — does the ministry fund any of these types of programs? If the ministry does, could he perhaps be a little bit specific in pointing out what they are?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation doesn't tend to fund those direct services that the member refers to. What we tend to do is play a coordinating role, where possible, across government. We tend to work in bringing the conversation to the leadership council, so we can identify, through the feedback they're getting from first nations, what's working, what's not and where we can make improvements. Then we work, again, across government to try and rectify those situations.

We do provide some funding through part of our ministry to help support friendship centres. But again, that's not in terms of the direct services that those friendship centres provide. Rather, it's funding that really is more of a nature of allowing friendships to then do the work that they do and to access program delivery funds from other ministries.

**H. Lali:** Now I want to talk about the New Relationship fund. Like members of the government, members on the opposite side were happy to see that there was a \$100 million fund that was going to be made available for capacity-building and other items. We're still waiting to see some of the details on how the fund's going to be administered and put out and what kind of results it could achieve. Obviously, the fund was a good thing.

A lot of the treaty-making involves capacity. There are a lot of questions related to capacity. Aboriginal people are unable to come to the table, simply because they don't have the expertise, i.e., capacity, to be able to do their research and sit down at the table as equal negotiating partners with government and, also, with non-government entities. It's a real problem.

We were quite happy to see that there was a \$100 million fund. But I would also say that this one-time shot of \$100 million is not going to be enough because of the number of bands and tribal councils in British Columbia. Obviously, the bands number in the hundreds. If you do the math, there are not a lot of funds to be passed around in terms of trying to build capacity.

[1640]

My question is to the minister. Why stop at just one year? We all agree that it's a good thing. There isn't a

single member on the opposition bench who doesn't agree that that New Relationship fund of \$100 million is not a good thing. We all agree that it's a good thing. But why stop at just one year? It's not just multi-year work that is out there; it's decades of work. Why not extend that fund beyond just the initial year and have a year-after-year, ongoing fund where aboriginal people can actually plan for the future instead of just looking at this one-time shot?

If you divide it by the hundreds of bands that are available out there, that exist in British Columbia, the \$100 million fund doesn't go a long ways. It works out to something of about \$300,000 to \$400,000 per band. The capacity-building needs a lot more resources and finances than just the one-time shot.

I'd like the minister to respond and tell me: why stop at one year? Why not go forward in a multi-year program?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The fund has been established. There's \$100 million in the fund. The legislation that established the fund set out some principles, one of which is to try and ensure that this fund pays for capacity-building where there are not other funds already available for that purpose. The intent there was for this funding to try and fill gaps in the opportunity to build capacity but also to specifically try and leverage additional dollars from other sources. So there is the opportunity for this \$100 million fund to grow.

Certainly, it's not anybody's expectation that a year from now or two years from now the \$100 million is all going to be spent. It's going to be available for a number of years to build capacity because, as the member has acknowledged, it takes time to build capacity.

In one of his earlier questions, the member referenced that from a starting point, first nations — at the foundation — are further behind the rest of the population. I think the member said that, essentially, in order to effectively enable first nations to take advantage of all of the programs that are available to the public at large or to the general population, we have to do the work to bring them up to that place of equality so that they're then in a position to take advantage of the programs of general availability, just as everybody else is.

Part of that capacity-building is, in fact, to assist in doing that and will, over time, ensure that we start to narrow the gap that, I guess, is there at the foundation level. So moving forward, we see that aboriginal people are participating at the same rates or, ideally, even higher than the general population in filling the need for a variety of skills right across society.

The \$100 million is going to go a long way to doing that. I think we're all very much looking forward to the board's development of this first strategic plan and their setting of the priorities, which will be set based on consultations with first nations and the public at large, to see where the initial investments are going to be made to build capacity and to...

I think what I would envision is that as we start to see that capacity build within those first nations communities, they are going to be able to take advantage of

some of the economic opportunities that are available for their community and for them as individuals. As they do that, that's actually going to reinforce the ability to build capacity. So it becomes a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy once the exercise of starting the capacity-building begins.

Certainly, this \$100 million fund provides a strong, strong beginning. We're hopeful that it will leverage other contributions to build capacity, and I think all of us will be watching. Two years from now.... There's a five-year review built into the act that established the fund to determine what difference this is making. Do we need to look at other measures? We're committed to narrowing those gaps, and this is one tool that we think is going to go a long way to doing that.

[1645]

**H. Lali:** I have one final question before I pass it on to members to my left — geographically speaking. I just want to talk about forest and range agreements and the repudiation of those by the UBCIC. I just want to see what the minister's thoughts are in terms of trying to either bring it back on track or find a solution.

I'd like to ask the minister: what is the role of the ministry in terms of the forest and range agreement, and what steps is the minister prepared to take to make sure that there is agreement between the government and first nations in this province?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The critic for the opposition asked a number of questions around forest and range agreements last week, but I'll say, hopefully, what I said last week as well. There was a considerable amount of work that went into the negotiation of a new forest and range agreement template, negotiation at the First Nations Leadership Council, at the new relationship table through last fall, to come to the proposed template.

That template is significantly different than what the original forest and range agreements were. We certainly believe that the new template provides a good opportunity for first nations to become involved in the forest economy and that it goes a long way to addressing a host of concerns that were raised with respect to the wording in the original forest and range agreement. I think we can't lose sight of the fact that we've had many, many first nations around the province who have chosen to take advantage of the opportunity these agreements provide.

Having said that, I recognize that the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs assembly has raised some specific concerns with the new template. I think some of those concerns aren't.... Well, it's new to us that they were raised in the context of the forest and range agreement, but they're not new concerns generally. They're ones that we recognize we need to make progress in addressing in our general conversation around revenue-sharing, around how we look at first nations having a better opportunity to participate in economic development.

That broader question is part of the work that's underway with the leadership council at the new rela-

tionship table. But the forest and range.... The new template was intended to be an interim agreement, as some of those bigger questions are still dealt with at the main table.

**C. Wyse:** I have, at this point, two questions for the minister, and I wish to give him somewhat of an advance warning of the general area where my questions fall. They're around land usage, ownership, issues of that nature.

The questions that have been given to me come from the ranching community of Cariboo South. The ranching community wishes the issues around treaties, including land usage and ownership, to be resolved. I wish to start off with that statement. However, the ranching community also wishes assurances that their interests and the possible impact on the ranching industry will be heard during the treaty process. My question to the minister: what process will be made available for this community to present their opinions during treaty negotiations?

[1650]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I appreciate the member's question, because he raises an important issue, and fundamentally, that is that whether it's in the context of the new relationship or more specifically in the context of treaty negotiations, at the end of the day, these are agreements that affect all British Columbians. They're intended, certainly, to address long-outstanding issues. I appreciate that the member is certainly supportive of the treaty process, and British Columbians as a whole are very supportive of the treaty process.

As we go through that process, we are engaged in continuous dialogue with different industry associations. Among them, in respect of the ranching industry.... We try to keep in contact with the British Columbia Cattlemen's Association, who tend to represent, generally, the interests of the ranching industry. Sometimes that dialogue perhaps isn't as frequent as many would like, but it tends to be driven by whether there's been a change in something that necessitates an update in terms of where each other's understanding is about where we might be going.

I'm not sure I'm being specific enough for the member. In the context of a treaty negotiation, for example, as the negotiations advance and the issues become more specific, then the need to get some input from the community and some feedback about the implications of the direction of the negotiation becomes more real. Rather than sitting down and having a discussion that's not really based on anybody knowing where the negotiation might go, I think as we make further progress in specific negotiations, there's a need, particularly in the area surrounding where a particular first nation exists, to start to ramp up the broader discussion with different organizations that represent local interests.

In the context of treaty negotiations generally, we meet from time to time with different industry associations. In the context of the new relationship generally,

we meet from time to time with industry associations to hear directly what their interest is in the land base, to hear what their concerns are about any potential changes in how tenures might be allocated, to hear their input on what they think should be government's policy — whether it's tenures, whether it's other decisions with respect to Crown land.

Obviously, in a province like British Columbia, there is a broad range of often competing interests at play on the land base, and we need to be in relatively continuous dialogue to ensure that we're getting that input and that we can take into account a variety of those competing interests as we're making decisions.

[1655]

**C. Wyse:** I appreciate the response from the minister. The question has complexity to it, and I appreciate that. However, process allowing for input is important in all discussions that are taking place.

Once more, if I understood the minister correctly, there are two different sets of circumstances in which input is provided: one closer to where the actual discussions or settlements, or whatever the right terminology would be, are taking place; and a more general set of circumstances of industrial consultation, which leads me to my question now. What resources has the minister identified to provide for this process at the more local set of circumstances, as well as what resources have been provided by his ministry for the broader consultation process that he has alluded to in his answer?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I suspect the member's question involves an issue of internal and external resources. What financial support do we provide to others to engage with us in discussion? Certainly, it varies a bit from year to year, but I know in '04-05 there was just under \$400,000 provided to local governments to engage in additional discussion with the first nations and with us as we got closer on a number of treaty tables. I don't have the exact dollars for '05-06, but it would likely be something similar.

Those are dollars that are provided by the ministry. We don't provide direct funding to the industry organizations that we tend to engage in some of the discussion — the Business Council, Council of Forest Industries, Mining Association, the Cattlemen's Association.... I'm not going to list them all, because I'll miss somebody. I shouldn't have even started.

Those organizations are ongoing organizations that are dealing with government on a host of issues, a number of which may be first nations-related. But they're also involved in other issues. So we don't provide direct funding for those organizations.

[1700]

From the ministry's standpoint, in terms of our internal resources, I can't provide the member with a number — that it's X dollars or a number of specific FTEs — because it tends to be the work of our negotiators, who are involved, obviously, in negotiating treaties and other agreements.

In the context of doing that work, as we get closer to agreements, they're engaging more and more with interests other than the first nation whom they're negotiating with directly. So they will be consulting with industry, who may be impacted by a particular agreement, or they'll certainly be involved in discussions with local governments so that all of those issues that are of a provincial nature are ones we're aware of at the treaty negotiation table.

**C. Wyse:** I would like to thank the minister for his responses and at this time turn it over to my colleague to my right.

**S. Simpson:** I appreciate the opportunity to have a few minutes with the minister, and my questions are going to focus on urban aboriginal issues.

As the minister knows, the urban aboriginal population is very significant in the province — the off-reserve population. I know that in my community of Vancouver-Hastings I have a very significant population, as does the city of Vancouver, generally. The minister, of course, knows that the challenges in the urban aboriginal community are distinct from on-reserve — very difficult in some cases. It is a community that often feels that it's not heard in quite the same way that on-reserve first nations are heard, and faces challenges.

I guess the first question I have for the minister is: could he maybe just provide a bit of an overview of the role of the ministry in terms of dealing with urban aboriginal challenges? How does the ministry go about doing that? What are the objectives? What are the programs? What's generally the approach of the ministry on urban aboriginal issues?

[1705]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The ministry is not involved, to any significant degree, in direct service delivery in respect of the urban aboriginal population. Similarly, we're not involved significantly in direct service delivery for the non-urban aboriginal population but rather play more of a role of trying to assist in coordinating services that may be delivered by a number of other ministries and provide a supporting role in negotiating agreements that may involve specific organizations in an urban context or the federal government. By way of example, things like the Urban Aboriginal Strategy.... A number of the elements of that will be guided by specific other provincial ministries, but we'll play more of a supportive role in trying to coordinate the province's approach to that.

We have a number of protocols or memorandums of understanding, one with the Métis Nation that deals both with rural and urban issues, but the Métis are largely.... They're not reserve-based obviously, so they, as an organization.... We work with them to try and identify where additional efforts need to be made in an urban context through a memorandum of understanding with the Métis.

Similarly, as I indicated to the member's colleague earlier, we play a minor role in terms of the support of

aboriginal friendship centres, who then access other direct programming dollars in order to deliver services within the urban context. But ours is more of a general support role from, I guess, a coordination or an administrative standpoint to ensure those agencies can function.

Certainly, as we look forward and as we pursue implementation of the transformative change accord, we see a growing role in terms of trying to ensure that in our work through the leadership council and with the federal government, we're actually having a very coordinated approach that meets the needs of both urban aboriginal populations and other aboriginal populations in the province.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

So I think we'll have not increasing responsibility but increasing work to do, quite frankly, in terms of bringing those pieces together to ensure that urban aboriginal populations are benefiting from or are participating in activities to close those gaps that have been identified as the goals of the first ministers meeting.

There was something else I wanted to add. Certainly, in the context of the first citizens fund, the New Relationship fund, the dollars available there aren't residency-based, other than within the province, so any programs pursuant to those will be available for urban aboriginal populations as well.

**S. Simpson:** As the minister will know, the.... I am supportive of the government investing dollars in building capacity — which is primarily on-reserve capacity, not exclusively but primarily — and the \$100 million that has been spoken about earlier that the government put forward for capacity. We know that that money will, in large part, be spent or directed by the on-reserve first nations. It will build capacity not exclusively for those communities, but those decisions and that process will be engaged there.

I know from my discussions with urban aboriginal interests in Vancouver, part of the frustration they feel is that they don't necessarily feel like they have a very effective voice at this point in time in discussion around where capacity gets built from an urban aboriginal perspective. I'm sure, as the minister knows, capacity is a very big challenge to meet the variety of issues that an aboriginal community in Vancouver faces with the array of agencies that all have their own leadership. They don't come under a single band. They all have their own leadership. They all have diverse interests. They serve different populations at different times.

The question I have is: what is the expectation of the government, or what plans does the government have, if any, to support capacity-building in urban aboriginal communities?

[1710]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I think, actually, it remains to be seen. You know, the member has made some pre-

sumptions in terms of where the focus of the New Relationship fund will be in building capacity. As the member has rightly identified, there is a good need to develop capacity both in the urban context and certainly within first nations communities that aren't in an urban context. So I think what we'll see is that we'll have a lot better idea how that's going to work as the board for the fund develops its first strategic plan and hears from the nations and the public about where the most significant needs are and where the priorities should be.

I think the member and I would likely agree that you're not going to be able to do everything all at once. I can tell the member that certainly, in the conversations that I've been party to with the leadership council, there is a keen awareness of the challenge of dealing with a variety of issues for the urban aboriginal population, and there is a keen awareness of the need to build capacity there and to identify what's working in respect of current services being delivered in an urban context and what more may need to be done.

Quite frankly, we have considerably more work to do, as I mentioned earlier, pursuant to the transformative change accord, where we're identifying what resources are already there federally, what additional resources may become available, what resources are being applied provincially and if there's there an opportunity for additional resources, and seeing what difference all of that makes on the ground in an urban aboriginal context. That will certainly require all of us to have significant additional engagement with the host of organizations that are doing good work within the urban aboriginal context.

[1715]

Some of that structure is in place through the Urban Aboriginal Strategy that the member, I'm sure, is very aware of. Also, within the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, we deal directly with the United Native Nations in terms of being an urban political voice for aboriginal people, as well as, as I indicated before, the Métis Nation, who, again, represent a number of urban aboriginal people.

We'll continue to do that to try and identify what are the most critical needs and how we can work to address those. I think it is fair to say that while there has been considerable work done in the past — and again, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy is probably the most comprehensive block of that — we all agree there is a lot more that still needs to be done and a lot more discussion as to how exactly you do that.

**S. Simpson:** I appreciate the minister's comments. What the minister will know.... I guess, as the minister says, the presumptions that I've made reflect comments that have been made to me by people in my constituency who are active in the urban aboriginal community, who certainly are very supportive of the efforts being made by the leadership council in terms of the broader issues of moving forward the first nations agenda. But I know they feel some frustration as to their role in that.

Part of that challenge is their need to build capacity, and do they have the resources to do that? I will raise this question in a minute, but for example, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Vancouver certainly receives funding, I know, from a number of ministries for program delivery. But its core funding — and the Aboriginal Friendship Centre has probably been around about 35 years in Vancouver; I think since about 1970 — is about \$170,000. That provides for the core staff, and out of that, they are the hub in Vancouver and play that role of the hub for a whole variety of agencies, not just in the city proper but really in the lower mainland region. They have a pretty limited core support to do that, so they have capacity challenges there. I know that, and their executive director has expressed those concerns to me.

The question I have again is what is, then, maybe, if you build capacity.... My experience in capacity-building, in my time before coming to this place, is that the whole consultation process and how the discussion goes on to identify needs are a very large piece of that. I'd be very interested to know what the role of the ministry is and what role the ministry's playing in those consultations with urban aboriginal groups.

Maybe we'll talk about Vancouver, because it's the area that I know best. I'm sure there are other situations in Prince George and other communities around the province, but in Vancouver, what discussion is going on in terms of consultation around what the needs are, what the ministry could be doing, what kind of supports may be there and the role the ministry can play as a liaison with other ministries that deliver program dollars? Certainly, I know that there are some tensions currently in play around the \$100 million and around what money might or might not come to the urban aboriginal community. I know their frustration is that they don't necessarily feel they have the voice that they should have in those discussions.

[1720]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** There are two distinct things happening: one with respect to the New Relationship fund and the \$100 million that's there for capacity-building, and a second in respect to the transformative change accord and how we pursue the goals set out there in terms of closing the gaps in education, health, housing and economic opportunity.

Dealing with the first for a moment, as the member may recognize, the New Relationship Trust Act establishes a board of directors. That board of directors is exclusively responsible for consulting with first nations and the public as a whole about developing a strategic plan and the priorities of how the dollars will then be applied and how, in fact, the dollars will be accessed once that plan is in place. The provincial government doesn't play a very direct role, nor does my ministry, in the development of that plan. It is driven very much by first nations.

We need to remember when we talk.... We tend to get stuck talking in the context of first nations on reserve or off reserve, when at the end of the day, we're

dealing with individual people who actually move on reserve and off reserve. There is in some cases a significant degree of movement through one's lifetime in terms of going from reserve to an urban setting, then sometimes back. It is important that everybody recognize when we're talking about capacity-building that people are moving around, and they take their skill sets with them.

Certainly, as I think I indicated earlier, in the discussions I've had with the members of the First Nations Leadership Council, they're keenly aware of and feel a strong responsibility — notwithstanding they may be on reserve — for their members who have chosen to go to an urban setting. In some cases one of the challenges is: what effort is required to kind of keep that link to a member of a particular first nation who's in downtown Vancouver but may be Haida? How do they keep that link to Haida Gwaii?

I think there is some work that probably can be done to assist there. But that's — I'm getting off course here — the one thing in terms of the New Relationship fund.

The second piece in terms of the transformative change accord and how that evolves.... There is significant discussion as to how to move that forward in our discussions with the First Nations Leadership Council.

As we undertake those discussions, both the members of the leadership council and members of the provincial government need to keep in contact with urban aboriginal organizations — certainly with the Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, the United Native Nations and others — to ensure that we have all of the right information in pursuing the goals set out by the transformative change accord. The reality is that if we actually make significant progress in closing the socioeconomic gaps that exist but we only do that on reserve, there is going to be a glaring failure if we haven't addressed the challenge in the urban aboriginal context as well.

I think everybody involved is keenly aware of the need to have a meaningful, broader discussion about: what are the elements of the plans that come into place by virtue of the transformative change accord? What are the elements that are going to be specific or that need to be there for the urban aboriginal population? How do we effectively make sure we're getting those elements in place as the plans develop?

[1725]

I think part of the member's frustration, and perhaps mine from time to time right now, is that we're still in pretty early days of the transformative change accord. The accord itself identified that we want to develop implementation plans through this calendar year, by December 2006. That is work that is still in its relative infancy.

I would agree, as I think the member is suggesting, that there is still significant need to allay the concerns of organizations working in the urban context that we want their input as we go forward. We want, at the end of the day, to be addressing the challenges they face as well.

**S. Simpson:** I appreciate that comment. I would agree with the minister that around the first nations fund, it's absolutely appropriate that it be within a structure and board that's made up primarily of first nations interests, with some government involvement, and that this board needs to be the decision-making body. That's their job and their responsibility, and I absolutely support that.

The challenge I see here, and I guess this is the issue, is that when the minister talks.... I also agree with the minister that it's very important to keep the linkages between aboriginal people who have chosen to come to Vancouver or Prince George and who come from the Haida or other first nations bands — that those opportunities and those linkages be kept as strong as possible between their home territories and their place now in Vancouver. But as the minister will know, the challenges that aboriginal people are facing, I know, in Vancouver with challenges around poverty, challenges around education issues — I look at graduation rates — challenges around addiction issues, challenges around crime and all of those.... These are all very difficult issues that there are no easy solutions for.

The problem is.... First nations people in places like Vancouver and other communities, of course, come together, and their culture is their aboriginal heritage. In some ways that transcends, a little bit, their nations, in terms of how they come together and work together within the geography that they're in — whether it be Vancouver, whatever. They build their own structures there, whether it be the board of directors of a friendship centre or a youth organization or whatever. What they bring is their commonality, their aboriginal heritage together, and that's what they build on.

The challenge that I see here is that as the minister talks about the hard work that has to come over the next year to put implementation plans in place, what I'm hearing from people in my community, who are working very hard to make Vancouver a great place for aboriginal people to live and raise their families and have success and build a positive place, is that they need to be part of that discussion in some way. They're not sure that.... As the minister will know, the last thing that people want is to see an implementation process go by and then at the end of the day be told: "Here, we have something good for you to do." That's not going to work.

I have two questions, and then I'll turn it over to my colleague. Maybe I will ask them both at once. I might come back for another one, but maybe this will work.

The first question I guess that I have is: can the minister advise me as to what I should tell the leadership of the Vancouver urban aboriginal community, whom I talk to on a regular basis, about what their expectation should be from the ministry in terms of ensuring they're engaged in this? They believe that the ministry has a role.

The second thing is: could the minister tell me whether he's actually met with folks from the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre or the Vancouver

aboriginal community? If not, would he be open to sitting down with some of those groups and speaking directly with them about the challenges and the issues that they have so that his direct insights are better? Maybe he's already done that, and I would congratulate him if he has.

[1730]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I should just make sure that the member is aware of a couple of things, because I didn't mention them earlier. Through this last year there was about \$1.5 million within the ministry that was available for both urban and rural aboriginal organizations — not first nations governments, but community organizations — for capacity-building initiatives, to help them look at opportunities to build their capacity. Part of that was for what's called The Centre for Sustainability, which really was specific to helping aboriginal non-profit societies look at ways to develop their capacity. So there has been funding to try and build that capacity over time.

In terms of the member's two specific questions — the first one in terms of what aboriginal organizations should expect from the ministry.... Certainly, they should expect, if they have views they want us to know about, that we listen. I would encourage them — whether they're the member's constituents or others around the province — if they have concerns, to write to me and let me know what those are so that we can ensure, in the broader discussion, that we're doing that.

As the member will know from his own experience over the last number of months, one of the challenges as an MLA — and it becomes somewhat exponential as a minister — is the lack of opportunities to go and meet with different organizations. As hard as we do try, we certainly can't meet with everybody.

I have had an opportunity to meet with a few organizations from the urban aboriginal community. The aboriginal housing association. I've met with the UNN and with Cheryl Matthew's research group. I'm going to apologize to Cheryl, because they're doing great work, but I can't remember what the name is off the top of my head. We had a very good meeting, I recall, in terms of some of the work they were doing. I am looking forward to an opportunity to meet with the Vancouver Friendship Centre. I think that is an important group. They're doing exceptional work, and I do want to have an opportunity to hear from them directly.

Certainly, if the member has suggestions as to others he would like to suggest that I meet with, I'm happy to do that. The challenge does remain of finding the time to do each of those meetings, but I certainly agree with the member's premise that it's critical that we're aware of issues which may be specific to an urban context for aboriginal people and that we have good knowledge of those issues as we address plans to try to address closing the gaps in education, health, housing, economic opportunity. Those are very clearly issues within both an urban context and a first nation community context.

[1735]

**S. Simpson:** I want to thank the minister. I would make one suggestion. Maybe the place to go here.... The Aboriginal Friendship Centre is a good place to organize this. The minister may know of the Vancouver Aboriginal Council, which is a body of upwards of 50 aboriginally based organizations in the greater Vancouver area who work together on service delivery and on a range of issues. They mostly work in service delivery around social programs.

That's a possibility, to be able to meet with a number of groups in one place and maximize the minister's time, because I know it's probably very difficult for him to be able to make time because of the demands on him. I would encourage that, and I certainly will be encouraging the Friendship Centre to take the minister's advice and to correspond with him and invite him to come and visit and do what they see fit.

I do thank the minister for his time. I look forward to being able to discuss these issues in the future with the minister.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Just one thing I should add. I think one of the risks of establishing a Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is that people then tend to point to me, as the minister, and to the ministry as being solely responsible for development of the relationship between the province and aboriginal people. The reality is that this is very much a cross-government initiative. While this ministry may play a coordination role, one of the goals of government is to ensure that whether it's the Minister of Children and Family Development, the Minister of Health or the Minister of Education — I'm not going to list them all — we are developing relationships with aboriginal people and with first nations.

I know, certainly, from discussions with a number of colleagues, that even where I, myself, haven't had the opportunity to meet with specific aboriginal organizations, in many cases my colleagues — particularly where they have a direct service-delivery relationship with a particular organization — are out there seeing exactly what's happening on the front lines and are getting that important feedback. I just wanted to ensure I wasn't leaving the impression that this all falls to one minister, to be building this relationship. It is very much intended to be — and is, in fact — a cross-government effort.

**N. Simons:** Madam Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to ask questions through to the minister.

My question is around treaties and some issues specific to the first nations in my constituency — which, among others, include the Sechelt and Sliammon nations. In particular, I'm wondering what the ministry's stand is on what they're calling incremental treaty: the possibility of settling, shall we say, some tables, and while we're waiting for other tables to be resolved, somehow allowing the agreements that have come at certain tables — for example, land use — to be binding until other aspects are settled.



**Hon. T. Christensen:** I thank the member for his question. Certainly, our energies have been focused on obtaining final agreements. As the member knows, that's been elusive for a long number of years now, and I'm very optimistic that we're getting very close to finalizing some treaties.

We have approached the federal government in terms of exploring the opportunities to look at sort of an incremental approach to treaties, to try and move the treaty process along. Certainly, that's a live discussion in the context of the new relationship and the host of potential arrangements that might flow from that. In terms of our current energies and our preference at this point, it's certainly to finalize the AIPs that we have right now.

[1740]

**N. Simons:** Yes, I understand the desire to actually finalize the larger issues as a whole, but I do think it's possible that some nations are feeling that there is extra pressure that interferes with some of the negotiation when there is knowledge that certain land-based activities are taking place, despite what might have been resolved at the treaty table.

So the added pressure in the negotiation could actually have a detrimental effect on that. I know that Sliammon is excited and encouraged by a lot of the discussion that's taken place. I understand that, in fact, the federal government is willing to consider the incremental nature of treaty. I'm just wondering: will there be an actual announcement or decision regarding incremental treaty, or is it the position now that the current desire to seek full AIPs is the only way that's going?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I think the best way to summarize it is: we are not precluding the option of incremental treaties at this point. I think we have considerably more work to undertake to see how exactly that would work in the context of the treaty process and in the context of getting to final treaties, but it is not something that we're dismissing outright as a potential option.

**N. Simons:** My next question has to do with the concept of self-government and where that fits into the treaty process. I understand there are some nations who are willing to deal with this issue in a number of ways. My concern is: is it possible, and are the ministry and province in fact considering bringing self-government back as an actual component of treaty, as opposed to a side-table discussion?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** On the issue of governance, there is a host of issues at play at the treaty negotiation tables. Some of them we're coming to resolution on. Some of them we have considerably more work to do to see if we can get to resolution.

So there is a host of discussions going on there at this point, and the negotiators are working hard at trying to come to resolution on all sides.

**N. Simons:** Is it fair to characterize the issues around governance as...? Has one of the sides hit a

wall? Is there room for negotiation in terms of self-government beyond the municipal design? Are there attempts to find new common ground, or do we see at the table the conflict and where the two sides meet and neither goes any further?

So to summarize my long-winded question: is there anticipation or any movement on the part of the provincial government with regards to self-government?

[1745]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I think it's fair to say that we're continually striving to find common ground at the negotiation table. I hesitated last week and I will hesitate today, as well, to get into more details around the negotiation, because there are at least three negotiators — usually teams of them — at each of the tables who are trying to work through a host of outstanding issues to get towards final agreements. It wouldn't be constructive for me to dissect those in this context.

**Hon. B. Penner:** I move that the House do now recess until 6:45 p.m.

Motion approved.

**The Chair:** This House will recess until 6:45.

The committee recessed from 5:46 p.m. to 6:47 p.m.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

On Vote 10 (*continued*).

**S. Fraser:** If I may, I would like to touch on, prior to the other members — I have a few other questions from other members as they come in here — the First Citizens Forum. I've got some feedback on that event, and I understand the event itself is not necessarily.... Am I correct? Is this the ministry that actually leads on that forum?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Yes. It's the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation that coordinates the forum. This is the one we had last Friday.

**S. Fraser:** Is it funded through this ministry's budget also?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Yes.

**S. Fraser:** I appreciate these answers. We're moving along nicely.

How much was budgeted for the event this year — the one last week?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The budget for this year's forum was \$62,000 overall — \$55,000 for delegate accommodation and travel expenses and \$7,000 for the Wosk Centre for Dialogue itself.

**S. Fraser:** Is this event always in the same venue? The annual event is always at the Wosk Centre?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** We initiated the First Citizens Forum as an annual event back in 2002, so this is the fifth one we've held. Each one of them has in fact been held at the Wosk Centre for Dialogue. We've found it's a very constructive place to hold these things.

[1850]

**S. Fraser:** I saw it billed as the fourth annual, so I don't know if I misread that, but it is not really consequential. There has been some contact with me regarding the venue and whether or not it will change, in that in some instances it may not feel like the most comfortable place. It may not necessarily represent some of the cultural settings. It might be wise to try to change the venue at some point in time. Has that been considered?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I appreciate the member's correction. We didn't actually hold the forum in 2005, given the timing in terms of the spring of 2005. This is the fifth year, but it's the actual fourth forum. I appreciate the member's correction.

In terms of the venue, that is actually something we give a lot of consideration to within the ministry, and we're always open to suggestions in terms of what the most appropriate forum is. One of the challenges is finding somewhere that people from around the province can get to relatively easily and finding a space that is big enough to host anywhere between 100 to 150 delegates in a structure that actually works to have dialogue — as opposed to a series of presentations.

Certainly, the Wosk Centre for Dialogue has to date served us very well. I'm sure the member has been there and knows the facility. It's established specifically for dialogue-type conferences. But certainly we're always keen on ensuring that if there are other ideas, if there are concerns about the nature of a particular venue, we look at all potential alternatives.

**S. Fraser:** Some of the comments I have received from some of the attendees at the conference.... They were questioning it. They were suggesting that sometimes it might be nice to have some variety as far as seeing some of the province, where some of the other particular first nations territories or issues are occurring and within different traditional territories — understanding the challenges of having a facility that can cater to this number of people. Still, I hope the minister is mindful of that.

I know at one point when I was on Tourism B.C., we broke from the mould of just having the meetings in Vancouver and Whistler. We started trying to be more inclusive throughout the province, just to be mindful of that concern.

One other issue came up about the way this particular event was laid out. It seemed that the time was tight and that elders were having a hard time getting their messages through and felt somewhat pressured by the time constraints.

Again, I'm not criticizing. I think it's a good event. Has the minister heard any of these concerns, and has

there been any thought of trying to address them for future events?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Certainly my experience at a number of different forums, both the First Citizens Forums and forums dealing with other issues, is that time constraints are often one of the most difficult things to deal with, and Friday was no exception. We tend to get a little bit behind in the agenda and then feel a bit rushed from time to time.

What I encourage participants from the forum to do, if they felt they didn't have sufficient opportunity to get their ideas out — to provide the extent of input they would have liked to — is to write to me. Provide that follow-up, provide additional thoughts on the issues that were being discussed on Friday around the preservation of indigenous languages, because it is an important topic. There was a good deal of passionate discussion about the topic on Friday. I'm looking forward to reviewing the information that came forward from the variety of breakout sessions. If there are participants that want to add additional information, I very much welcome that.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you for that. Is it possible to get the results from that particular session, if that could be made available? I know there'll be goals that will have come of that, and it would be helpful, as the opposition critic, to have access to that when it's made available.

[1855]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Certainly, we'll provide that to the member. We committed at the conclusion of the forum on Friday to prepare a record and a report of the day's proceedings so that there is a clear record of the discussion and some of the ideas that came forward. That will be the basis upon which we move forward in some of the work that I believe we should be doing coming out of a forum such as that.

We don't want it to be sort of a one-day wonder where there are great ideas, and then nothing happens. The whole intent of having forums like that is to get ideas from aboriginal community members from around the province — practical ideas about how we actually tackle the challenge of ensuring that we're protecting and, ideally, enhancing indigenous languages in the province. So we'll definitely be preparing that report, and it will be a public document.

**G. Coons:** I just have about five questions that I would like to ask, and I'll let you know what they are so you are prepared for it: one about the Heiltsuk accord; one about an ambulance for a first nations community; I want to talk briefly about the symposium in Prince George about the highway of tears and how it's really affecting first nations communities up and down the line; one brief question about Haida Gwaii negotiations; and something dealing with the ministry's involvement with the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum.

Just to start off with, as the minister knows and staff knows, Ross Wilson, chief councillor of Heiltsuk Nation, has been wanting to re-sign the Heiltsuk accord between the Heiltsuk Tribal Council and the government of British Columbia. It was due to be re-signed on March 31, 2002. It was about a month, six or eight weeks ago that I was in touch with the ministry. I'm just wondering where we're at with the re-signing of that accord.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Folks I have with me don't have the complete, up-to-date status of that, but we'll endeavour to get that for the member, and we'll try to do that in the time we have remaining this evening. But if not, we'll certainly follow up and provide that to him.

**G. Coons:** Yes, I look forward to that information.

The second thing is from Willard Martin, chief councillor with Laxgalts'ap village — Greenville. He is looking for an ambulance. I'm just wondering whether or not that is federal or provincial. He says that Greenville has provided emergency medical transportation for this community and Kincolith since the road was opened. They've done it effectively. They have an old emergency vehicle maintained by the village, and I don't think any other British Columbians, regardless of where they live, are subject to this. They have qualified personnel. They have proper storage, and they're just looking for an ambulance.

I noticed that during the situation a couple of weeks ago or so where we were looking at the government auctions and the garage sale — I'll refer to them as garage sales — there was an ambulance on there. I'm just wondering about the process where the community perhaps could access that and how we can do that. That might be something we can look into.

[1900]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** It won't come as a surprise to the member, I hope, that the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations doesn't have much to do with ambulances.

What I would suggest the member do, actually — encourage him to do — is to follow up with the Ministry of Health in terms of their responsibility for the B.C. Ambulance Service, as well as possibly the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services in terms of, I understand, their responsibility for dealing with surplus assets. There may be a couple of avenues that the member wishes to explore.

**G. Coons:** Thank you, minister. I guess those were the avenues I was looking for and where we can go on this together as we look at dealing with first nations throughout the rural communities.

The third issue I'd like to bring up is that last week the Highway of Tears Symposium in Prince George was held, with over 500 people in attendance. The Solicitor General and two or three other people from the House were there. It was very, very overpowering to see the heroic actions of the families who came out

with their stories, and I think it was a real start to the healing process in the community of Prince George.

I was there for most of the two days. I was in Hartley Bay for three days, and I thought it was really important for me to be there, so I got off to Prince George also. In Prince George two people from Prince Rupert were there. I think the constraints on travel and time and finances for people from my community to get to Prince George for this huge symposium had a big effect. Some of the other ministries committed some seed money to the process.

Up and down the line, when we look at the highway of tears and the effects on young aboriginal women and what's happening nationally, basically the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council indicated that the highway of tears in British Columbia is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to violence against first nations women. Hundreds of aboriginal women are presumed to have been killed, and many others are victims of violence in their own communities and small towns and urban centres. They push for everybody to continue to support the Sisters in Spirit campaign to bring justice to first nations and aboriginal women who are victims of violence.

I would hope the minister realizes that in my community and all the way to Prince George in the north, it's a real tragic happening that's been happening along that highway for 20 years. There are many communities along the road that also need public forums, not only Prince George.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

The recommendations will be coming out, but I'm hoping that perhaps the minister, through his ministry, may want to commit some funding to have some public meetings in some of the communities — like Prince Rupert, Terrace, Smithers, Burns Lake — where other families and friends couldn't make it due to constraints, financial or time, and also have that healing process. I'm just wondering if the minister would consider doing that as far as the highway of tears and the symposium.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation was one of the ministries that did provide financial support for the hosting of this very important symposium last week in Prince George. I think all of us are looking forward to the recommendations and advice that come forward from that symposium and to then deciding: okay, where do we go from here to ensure that women across Highway 16 and aboriginal women in particular, who have been, unfortunately, so victimized in this situation...? How can we all work together to avoid those sorts of circumstances in the future?

**G. Coons:** Yes, I totally agree, and I think the symposium was just the first start to what we need to do in communities all along the line from Prince Rupert to Prince George.

My next question deals with Haida Gwaii negotiations. I understand there's an agreed-upon process to gather and establish credible information in the forestry sector on Haida Gwaii. Everybody, first nations and non-first nations, all through Haida Gwaii, Queen Charlotte Islands — whether it's Sandspit, Queen Charlotte City, Masset, Port Clements — is looking for credible information. Information is a must, and communications is a must. I'm just wondering how the gathering and establishing of credible information in the forest sector is going and if there is a time line for that at all.

[1905]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** As the member is aware, we have a letter of understanding with the council of the Haida nation that has been in place for approximately ten months now. There has been considerable work undertaken pursuant to that letter of understanding.

Part of the challenge, as one embarks upon that work, is one of information-gathering and having the information to answer questions that arise on both sides. We have been engaged in considerable discussion with the council of the Haida nation in terms of what additional information might be required. We've been engaged with forestry stakeholders and local government, as well, to make sure that in the context of our discussions with the council of the Haida nation, we have awareness of the relevant need for additional information as well as the relative concerns and issues at play.

**G. Coons:** I guess at this point in time, as far as the gathering of information, it's ongoing, and we'll work on that as soon as possible.

Another question that I have.... Last week I spent three days in the village of Hartley Bay and with the heroic people of that village. My big concerns were the mental well-being of the people in that village who saw the horrific incident when the *Queen of the North* went down, and the first responders that were there in dealing with the women and children who were coming off the boats and taking them into their homes and to the cultural centre, and dealing with all the issues.

My big concern was: once they are gone, what's going to happen to the village and the people as far as the trauma and stress that they underwent? It just so happens that the first night I was there, somebody from FNESS — the first nations emergency social services — was there looking after that. I felt really comfortable that they were there. I had a meeting with the 18 or 20 first responders that were first on the scene, and the majority of those first responders from the village were 17-to-24-year-old kids. My heart just went out to them as they talked about the situation.

[1910]

It's going to be a long healing process in that village for what they went through and also the after-effects, when we look at the spill. I think we've got to be aware that it could possibly be a major disaster if the tanks erupt. I don't think the village and/or the region or any

ministry, federal or provincial, is ready for the worst-case scenario as far as equipment and training and the monitoring. So that's still a concern out there.

One last thing about this. The DFO just laid off their biologist who looks after habitat protection and works closely with first nations for area six, which spreads from Kitimat out to Hartley Bay — laid them off on Friday. That's a major concern that I hope to bring up in the House, as we as a province look at where we need to go with protection around Hartley Bay and the region. Just on that note, I wanted to give kudos to the First Nations Emergency Services Society for being there and for allowing me to be part of that. I spoke with them before on that. That's just sort of a bit of a sell for Hartley Bay.

My last question is dealing with the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum. In the last estimates, I was discussing issues with the minister, and I was talking about their core business executive and support services in that ministry. One of the key objectives is to build relationships with first nations and the strategies leading to the process of consultation and accommodation and implementing the first nations engagement strategy as far as its dealing with oil and gas. Under their time frame, they had....

The minister mentioned that MARR, your ministry, is a lead agency of the new relationship as we move forward and that the minister and his staff will develop the criteria for the first nations engagement strategy as far as oil and gas is concerned. I'm just wondering where the ministry is at in that aspect.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources is directly responsible, obviously, for their engagement with first nations in terms of decisions being made within that ministry. What my ministry is working on, together with the leadership council, is the broader consultation and accommodation framework, which is a critical part of the new relationship work. As we do that work with the leadership council, it will certainly inform the engagement strategy that different ministries have and adopt with respect to first nations.

I think it's fair to say that while each ministry is currently engaged with first nations, there is a broader framework that we're working on through the new relationship that will see some adjustments in terms of what individual ministries are doing over time — or may see some.

**G. Coons:** When I was talking to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum, and I wanted more information last estimates about the first nations engagement strategy, he was saying that MARR is the lead agency. Twice he indicated that MARR is the lead agency, and that's where it's going to be developed.

[1915]

I hope, as we move along and perhaps issues as far as consultation and engagement come out fairly quickly.... As we start to see that both the Hartley Bay elders and hereditary chiefs have come out, along with

the Haida, with concerns about tankers going through their territory due to what happened last week and the environmental damage that is happening to their traditional harvesting....

It was interesting, also, that there was a ministry workshop dealing with offshore oil and gas. One of the conclusions, whatever perspective you put it in, and I've had people respond to me before on this, saying that I took it out of perspective.... There is a conclusion, and I hope that this conclusion, in your process of consultation with first nations up and down the coast who are concerned about offshore oil and gas and, as it seems, more and more concerned about tankers.... One of the conclusions from the workshop that happened last October, I believe — the Waves of Opportunity Conference — was that B.C.'s marine communities are not globally significant in terms of biological composition, structure and vulnerability to oiling.

However, they are globally significant in terms of their intactness and importance to first nations. In addition, coastal complexity may magnify the impacts of the spill on first nations, as resources are concentrated in a small geographic area. So I would hope that as the minister moves along with the first nations engagement strategy as far as the oil and gas core business plan, that that's brought out to first nations that it is of significance.

I don't think there is a question on that issue in there at all to the minister, but on that I'm going to pass it on to one of my colleagues.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** One potential question arises from the member's comments. I do want to emphasize that, certainly, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is the lead ministry in the development of a new consultation and accommodation framework, and we're doing that work with the leadership council in the context of the new relationship. But each ministry will continue to have a role in engaging with first nations. They certainly do now, and I anticipate they will in the future.

The work that Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is leading is actually the development of the broad policy framework that would then be applicable to other ministries. But there will be ongoing engagement — certainly is now, and I would expect in the future — by all ministries.

The member had asked a question in terms of the Heiltsuk, and I have some information there that I can provide the member now. The Heiltsuk have submitted a major proposal to the province. It was actually submitted to the integrated land management branch, which is within the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and is responsible, as the member likely knows, for land and resource management plans. I'm told it's about a 400-page proposal and regards potential procedures for consultation across all lands and resource sectors. So it's a pretty comprehensive document. Certainly, the staff within the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation are aware of the proposal, and we're working with ILMB in terms of providing a response to the Heiltsuk.

**D. Routley:** Thank you to the minister and staff for entertaining my questions. I'll leave it to them to judge their entertainment value, though.

The minister is aware of a situation in my riding, I'm sure, where we have six nations. My riding overlaps the boundaries of six nations, most of them in the Hul'qumi'num treaty group. One of the bands, the people who occupy Kuper Island.... Kuper Island residents find themselves battling a particularly high level of unemployment and attendant difficulties. Kuper Island is also very isolated. It is served by the same B.C. Ferries vessel as is Thetis Island. There is a history of competition — shall I say? — for the spaces on that ferry. The people of Thetis Island.... The ferry goes there first and then to Kuper. Very often there's no room on the boat once it reaches Kuper.

[1920]

For years this was a source of great tension between the residents of Thetis and Kuper, until finally in the late '90s there was an accommodation schedule worked out between the chief of the band; the MLA at the time, Jan Pullinger; and B.C. Ferries.

I wonder if the minister has had any negotiations with the Minister of Transportation or with B.C. Ferries when it comes to maintaining service to Kuper Island? Economic development being one of the prime issues of concern on that island — the high unemployment rate that I mentioned — transportation is key to addressing those issues. The people of Kuper Island are attempting to develop new aquaculture industries, but their success will be largely dependent on transportation. I wonder if the minister has looked into that?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** As the member will know, the province and the federal government are engaged in active treaty negotiations with the Hul'qumi'num treaty group.

With respect to this specific issue regarding ferry service at Kuper Island, I'd encourage the member actually to raise it with the Minister of Transportation in terms of transportation issues generally. It's not an issue that has been brought to my specific attention.

**D. Routley:** In the Hul'qumi'num group, the largest band is the Cowichan tribes. It has the largest population, I believe, of any reserve in B.C. at roughly 3,000 members — approximately a third of those people living off reserve. One of the biggest issues for the Cowichan people is housing. Of approximately 2,850 members, we have a 450-family waiting list for housing. Is there anything being done by the ministry to help those who are being forced to seek accommodation off reserve?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The member's correct that the Cowichan band is, I think, the largest in the province, and housing is a significant concern there. As the member likely knows, one of the issues identified in the transformative change accord was the need to make progress in providing adequate housing for aboriginal people. That is an issue both on and off reserve,

and it's something that we're engaging with the federal government on.

I have met with Chief Alphonse from the Cowichan band recently to talk about the housing issue and a number of other issues as well. We're certainly well aware of the issue. It's something where I think there is an opportunity to perhaps be creative, and we need to explore that more with the band. We need to explore that with the federal government, as well, in being consistent with the transformative change accord.

I don't have the magic answer for the member. I often wish I did have magic answers, but it's not often the case. We're going to pursue that working with the Cowichan and see what opportunities may be there.

**D. Routley:** The Hul'qumi'num group is, of course, proud and anxious to settle their outstanding issues and claims. In speaking to some of their negotiators and the various chiefs, there is a growing frustration and resentment of the process — a feeling that, if I may interpret, they are being spent into bankruptcy in pursuing their claims.

[1925]

Is there anything the minister can offer to the people of Cowichan and Hul'qumi'num peoples to encourage them to have faith or optimism in the process? It has been stalled a long time at the state it's in, and the people, particularly those involved in negotiations, are becoming frustrated.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I am sympathetic to perhaps the member's frustration, in terms of where the Hul'qumi'num treaty group feels it is at in terms of getting to a final agreement. I think it's a frustration that many of us share in terms of getting final agreements out of the B.C. Treaty Commission process. I've already spoken in estimates a few times about the desire to get to final agreements and my optimism that we are going to get there.

I can tell the member certainly at the Hul'qumi'num table that the province has a well-resourced treaty team working on those negotiations. We're certainly fully engaged in the negotiations with the Hul'qumi'num, and there are often, as I know the member will be aware, pretty challenging issues at some of the treaty tables and limits in terms of what some of the possibilities are. But I'm confident that if we remain focused on trying to find agreements — be creative, if necessary, to get agreements — that there's significant potential for the Hul'qumi'num to realize an AIP and a final agreement.

**D. Routley:** One quote that was given to us by one of the Hul'qumi'num negotiation team was that he saw "a failure of the state to negotiate in good faith." He based that contention on the fact that at that table — being one of the largest tables in the province and most advanced in the process — according to him, there was no chief negotiator, no legal counsel at the table. If that is the case, or if it isn't the case, what new resources can be or have been allocated to the Hul'qumi'num table?

[1930]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** At the Hul'qumi'num table, there's a senior negotiator there. Depending on where the negotiations are at or what the issues are at a particular time, additional resources and additional expertise will be brought in to deal with issues on a case-by-case basis. Certainly, from the province's perspective, we're very much engaged in trying to find some solutions there.

**D. Routley:** Could the minister tell me how much, in terms of money, is budgeted to remedy this circumstance at the Hul'qumi'num table? Have there been resources specifically allocated to move the Hul'qumi'num treaty process forward?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Madam Chair, I can't tell the member that. We don't break down our budget based on a treaty-table-by-treaty-table negotiation-team basis. We have 50 FTEs who are negotiators across the ministry, and we apply those resources depending on where we need them, depending on the status of each of the negotiation tables. It's pretty much impossible to specify it as a specific FTE complement or, certainly, as a specific dollar complement.

**D. Routley:** My last question will bring the minister's former experience as Education Minister to play. I'm sure the minister's aware of the education improvement agreements that school boards have with first nations bands. As a former school trustee, I, other trustees and many of the people in Cowichan tribes were frustrated by the fact that the education improvement agreements were simply rolled over each time they were renewed.

In the case of the Cowichan school district, there was a commitment to endeavour to hire from the first nations of the region, in order to provide examples to the students in the system, as well as to provide a more equitable employment mix. In general, employment in the Cowichan region disfavours first nations people. The Chemainus band in Ladysmith, for example: there is only one first nations employee in the entire township of Ladysmith, I believe — one. I might be wrong. There may be two now, but the number is quite extraordinarily small.

The provincial representation of first nations people is around 2 percent. In my riding, it's more like 9 percent. Certainly, that 9 percent is nowhere nearly represented in the employment in the Cowichan region. What is the minister doing in order to improve the prospects of particularly young first nations people seeking employment in the broader community?

[1935]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** We've been primarily working through what was originally the aboriginal employment partnership initiative, which was intended to reduce workplace barriers to the recruitment and retention of aboriginal people in large public and private sector organizations. Certainly, there has been some

success there, and that work continues. We have started, at least, some consideration of how we better ensure participation of aboriginal people in terms of the public sector workforce. What are the barriers to that? I think there are some opportunities there.

Certainly, as we pursue discussions with the leadership council around the new relationship, the concept of potential secondments arises. I think there's actually a big opportunity there going both ways. As first nations are more involved in land and resource management and decision-making around that, there'll be opportunities for aboriginal people to come and spend some time working with the provincial government, then go back to their own communities and continue that work. Similarly, I think there's an opportunity for public servants to go and be seconded to aboriginal communities in terms of some of the work they're doing.

There's nothing like that in place now, but those are opportunities that, as the new relationship evolves, I'd like to explore further.

**S. Fraser:** In the interests of new relationships, I will be turning this questioning over to your member for Bulkley Valley–Stikine. I'm going to try to get the last hour in, if I can, to finish this. There's a lot more material to happen. With that, I will turn it over.

**D. MacKay:** I think the minister probably knows that I feel quite strongly about accountability. In order to get to the accountability questions that I want to ask, I'm going to remind everybody that in order to reach a new relationship with our aboriginals, I think what we have to do is go back in time and history and have a look at what happens when accountability is missing or doesn't appear to be there or we wander away from things that we've learned or should have learned from the past.

I'd like to take us back to 1776 and the Declaration of Independence. You might ask why I am going back to the American Revolution. The Declaration of Independence was an example of taxation without representation. The 13 colonies in the United States were upset because there was no representation on the taxation side from Great Britain. That was one of the rallying cries for the independence movement in the United States that actually saw the United States cede from Great Britain back in 1776.

Now when we move into a little more of a different era, 1867, we have a look at the British North America Act, which is actually the forerunner for the Canadian constitution. The British North America Act talks about the powers that will be devolved from the British North America Act.

[1940]

It talks about the powers of the federal government, it talks about the powers of the provincial government, and it also talks about who's responsible for what. In the British North America Act it mentions that the federal government will be responsible for the Indians and lands reserved for the Indians.

As we move further into the act, it talks about the exclusive powers of the provincial Legislature, and it talks about what the provincial Legislature has the authority to do. It talks about the municipal institutions in the province. So it talks about the devolution or the delegated authority to municipalities to have a power of government, but nowhere in there does it mention a third order of government. Of course, I'm referring to the now Nisga'a Lisims government that we have in place. There's no provision for that in the British North America Act; there's no provision for it in the Canadian constitution.

We seem to be not learning from past experience. Our aboriginal people rely on treaties that are as old as the ones I'm quoting for some of the rights and privileges that they're looking forward to today. When British Columbia joined Confederation, the Act of Union is what brought British Columbia into the federation. Before we were accepted into the federation, one of the conditions that we had to meet as a province was to set aside some lands for the use and benefit of our aboriginal people. We did that, and after that was done, Canada accepted the province of British Columbia as a partner in Confederation — once again, leaving the responsibility for our aboriginal people to the federal government.

It's interesting now as we move forward into 1988.... The Indian Act was changed in 1988 to permit natives to impose property tax on reserve lands occupied by leaseholders, mostly non-aboriginals, who lived there and who now have no voting rights or representation on taxation issues that affect them. Out of the 80 bands that took up the taxation on land, 54 of those were in British Columbia. It's interesting because what those 54 native bands did.... They taxed the non-aboriginal people and excluded their own people from any taxation.

I think back about ten years ago, they had raised about \$30 million through taxation. When I talk about "no taxation without representation" in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, I just have to look to Nisga'a, which was signed in this chamber probably six or seven years ago. There are people living on core lands that are under the Nisga'a Lisims government, who have no taxation say whatsoever, and they cannot be part of the Lisims government.

Again, we seem to have made a mistake, contrary to the British North America Act and contrary to stuff that we should be learning as we move forward with this. Westbank is another great example of a large non-native population living on a reserve. They have no say in the taxation that affects them, and they can't be part of the government. My issues are more around the accountability to the taxpayers and to their own members.

Of course, I'm going to refer you now to the B.C. Rail trust fund, which I understand now is actually wrapped up. I wonder if the minister could tell me if the B.C. Rail trust fund is FOI-able.

[1945]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I thank the member for his question. I apologize for the delay. There were a host of

issues that the member raised in terms of his introduction to the issue. On going through them, the vast majority are actually outside of provincial jurisdiction. So I'm not going to comment specifically on those.

In terms of the specific question asked about the B.C. Rail trust fund, it is not a public body within the confines of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, so it's not covered by that act. It is, however, a corporation, so it's subject to the same legal obligations and responsibilities as any other British Columbia corporation.

**D. MacKay:** So if I understand the response, then I could not ask for information through freedom of information to find out where the money was spent on the B.C. Rail trust fund, but they do report to themselves within the corporation. Is that correct?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The trust is responsible, as set out in the act — as I understand it — to be accountable to the beneficiary first nations. So it's not accountable beyond that in terms of reporting, but it does have reporting requirements to the first nations who are beneficiaries of that trust.

**D. MacKay:** That begs the question, then.... I was speaking to an aboriginal person the other day on the B.C. Rail trust, and it's my understanding that some of the people that should have received some of that money did not get it. I guess I have to ask the question on his behalf: how does somebody who feels that they were left out of the loop when it came time to distribute the B.C. Rail trust money...? How does one find an answer to the question: why was it not distributed to all the natives who were entitled to it?

[1950]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The board for the trust is made up of the beneficiary first nations of the trust. Those beneficiaries were designated in a schedule to the act, based on, as I understand it, whether those first nations had a relationship with B.C. Rail prior to the establishment of the trust. As the member knows, this all stems from the B.C. Rail Partnership agreement.

Any particular member of one of those bands would contact the board in terms of asking for a reporting as to where the funds were allocated from the trust. If they were not part of the beneficiary first nations listed in the schedule, then they're not a beneficiary under the trust in any event, so there's no obligation to provide them that information.

**D. MacKay:** Thank you to the minister for that response. I guess I should maybe just qualify that a tiny bit. There's one thing to have knowledge, and there's another thing called wisdom. I don't profess to be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but there are problems on native reserves where there's a great deal of intimidation amongst themselves — those who are elected and those who are not elected. To try to garner any infor-

mation from an elected official on a reserve is quite often met with a great deal of resistance.

I have to ask the question again. If he is part of the entitlement, and he does not get a response back from the board that made up the B.C. Rail trust fund, where does he go?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Certainly if somebody felt they were entitled to benefit from the trust and felt that they did not, they should seek legal advice in that respect and look at what avenues are available to them. It is a trust-type arrangement. The board has obligations pursuant to that arrangement.

An individual or a band who feels that they haven't been treated fairly in terms of how the trust was established.... Their best avenue would be to seek legal advice in that regard. It is worth noting that there are, within the act itself, requirements of reporting — as I indicated earlier — to the beneficiary first nations along with audited financial statements in that regard.

**D. MacKay:** For the sake of brevity, because I do have several more questions I'd like to get to before I give up the floor, I will follow up on that. But I should remind the minister that, as I talked about knowledge and experience, when you work with natives as long as I have worked with natives.... There is a great deal of mistrust amongst themselves, and it is extremely difficult to get anything from one of the elected officials while they're holding office on a reserve. But I will follow up on that through different avenues. I will contact the minister at a later date.

The \$100 million trust fund that was just recently set aside by the government. I'm assuming that that is also not FOI-able by anybody.

[1955]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The corporation set up to administer the \$100 million New Relationship fund is not a public agency. It is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

There are a significant number of accountability measures built into the act. It is a seven-member board of directors, two of whom will be appointed by the province. There's a requirement in that act to consult with first nations and the public in development of a strategic plan that will then be a public plan in terms of how the fund is going to be accessed and the priorities that are going to be set in terms of building capacity. There's a requirement for annual reports in that, which are reports to the public or are publicly available, as well as audited financial statements. In addition to that, the act provides for a five-year review to look at whether it's met its purposes in terms of building capacity within first nations communities.

**D. MacKay:** Once again, I'm assuming that I could not access through the freedom of information any spending that took place within the \$100 million trust that has been set aside. It's one thing to have a financial audited statement available for the public, but that



doesn't really tell you on what the money was spent or whether or not we've achieved any results with the money that we are now making available for this trust.

I should just qualify to the minister that I get phone calls from all over the province — in my own riding. I get them from the north coast, the central interior and the southern interior — on native issues. These are questions that have been raised by a number of people from around the province, not just my part of the province; nor is it just me asking these questions. I don't disagree that we as a government have to do more for the natives that have been sitting on reserves for the last 135 years. We have done nothing except throw a great deal of money at them with no accountability. The money is being spent, but we don't seem to be getting the results that we should be getting.

There are a couple of great examples. We just have to look up north at Davis Inlet, where the federal government spent \$300 million to relocate 680 natives who were having a great deal of problems up there with substance abuse. We spent \$300 million to relocate them, and all we did was relocate the problem. We changed the bucket to a flush toilet and the wood stove to a furnace, but the problems still exist. We are spending a great deal of money on these people, and there's no accountability in there.

Another great example is the one in Saskatchewan where the health issue arose because of a tainted water system up there. There are some interesting comments that came out of the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, where we talked about the problems with our natives on reserves and the fact that we spend more than \$70,000 per reserve resident. One of the things that caught my attention — I just want to leave it with the minister — says: "We are happy that hundreds of families are being flown out of Kashechewan to get the medical treatment they deserve in modern cities. But these people would have brighter futures if their trips were one-way." Rather than send them back to where they have just left, and all that despair that awaits them....

We've also spent a great deal of money on education. We talk about FAS. We continue to spend money on preserving aboriginal rights. Just recently there was another announcement of \$1 million to preserve aboriginal rights. In 2004 there was a document indicating that we've already spent \$4 million to preserve aboriginal language. Are we getting any results from that? Does anybody ever check up on that?

That's what I'm getting at when it comes to accountability. Who checks up on this stuff? We talked about providing \$10 million to support aboriginal health programs through regional health authorities. Are we getting any results from the \$10 million we spent?

[2000]

Forty-four million dollars: \$950 for every aboriginal student in the province to improve aboriginal students' outcomes in school. I know we're getting some results there, because the Minister of Education reports out on it. But we don't hear anything on these other programs

— \$8 million to early childhood development programs in 41 urban and on-reserve aboriginal communities, over \$1 million to combat fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

What's happening in the school systems on the reserves is that those young native children are being left behind because there is no extra funding there to help them with special aide teachers for those kids who have FASD. What happens is that they get into the public school system, and now they are a problem because they've had no help while they live on reserves.

We're spending a great deal of money and not getting any accountability back. We're not looking to see if the money is being well spent, and that's where I'm coming from on these questions.

Could I ask the minister: is there one ministry in the provincial government that tracks all the funding that we spend on native reserves within British Columbia — just one ministry?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** At the beginning of the member's question he said that the audited financial statements don't tell where the money is spent, and that's fair comment. That's the reason we have a requirement for annual reports in the legislation that establishes the New Relationship Trust fund.

A combination of the strategic plans — because they'll be renewed on an annual basis, and they'll be three-year strategic plans — together with the annual reports will actually set out priorities, set out goals and set out performance measures and will then in the annual reports reflect on whether those performance measures, those goals, are being met and will give an indication of where the dollars are being spent to reach those goals. So there is that accountability built into the spending of the New Relationship Trust dollars.

With respect to the premise that there's no accountability, I would disagree quite fundamentally with the member. The reality is that when it comes to the expenditure of provincial dollars, there is very little spending that is on reserve, as the member knows. That is primarily the federal government.

The accountability measures in terms of what the provincial government provides to first nations that are delivering services are the same as we require of other organizations. We don't distinguish between aboriginal and non-aboriginal organizations when the province is providing service delivery dollars. We expect a service to be delivered if that's what we're providing funding for and require the same reporting mechanisms back to government. That will be across a host of ministries in terms of what those reporting requirements are.

I understand the member's concern, and it's certainly a theme that persists through public commentary when it comes to first nations — that there is no accountability there. I can tell the member that in my discussions with the First Nations Leadership Council and other first nations leaders around the province, there's an incredible sensitivity to the suggestion that there's no accountability. Particularly through the Assembly of First Nations, there are a number of steps

being taken to put accountabilities in place, to look at the concept of an independent auditor within the AFN.

[2005]

A consistent theme through all the discussions around the new relationship and, in particular, around the transformative change accord and the types of issues we're looking at there is: how do we set the goals we want to achieve? How do we then apply the resources to meet those goals, and how do we, on a consistent basis, measure whether in fact the resources we are applying are reaching our expected goals?

Everybody recognizes that there's a call for considerably more investment. There are billions of dollars already being invested, and there is a need to ensure that the money being spent — whether it's by the federal government or the provincial government — is actually making a difference to try and close the gaps that we've all identified are the gaps that need to be closed.

**D. MacKay:** So much of that money doesn't reach the women and children who live on reserves, who are the poorest on the reserve. That money never seems to get down to them, and I'm speaking from 40-some years' experience in British Columbia working on reserves. That problem still exists today. That's why I'm so adamant that there's got to be some accountability.

The minister told me.... I'm somewhat confused here, because he said that the \$100 million trust fund was not FOI-able. Is he telling me now that the three-year report comes back to this Legislature so we can review it?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** No, that's not what I'm saying. The annual reports and the strategic plans are public documents, so certainly we can pick one up and review it, but so can any other member of the public.

**D. MacKay:** I'm running out of time, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity. This is my final question to the minister.

I believe you responded previously to the member for Alberni-Qualicum. He asked a question about the amount of money being spent on treaty negotiations, and I think you said that over half of the money in your ministry was actually being spent on treaty negotiations. I'm assuming a great deal of that negotiation takes place in Vancouver, Victoria and elsewhere around the province.

I would like to ask the question: for those natives who attend — whether they're here as a consultant or a chief negotiator — when they are earning money off a reserve, is the province taxing the money that they have earned while they're off reserve?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Just a slight correction. The member referred to well over half of the budget being allocated for treaty negotiations. It's broader than that, and I tried to make that clear to the member for Alberni-Qualicum earlier. It's negotiations which in-

clude treaty negotiations, but it is certainly broader than that context alone.

In terms of compensation that individual aboriginal people or other people in the province might be receiving in the context of treaty negotiations or otherwise, my assumption is that anybody receiving income is complying with federal and provincial income tax laws.

**D. MacKay:** This is my final question. Well, minister, the employer — the person who's paying the bills if you're in private business — normally deducts the tax at source. So is the province deducting tax at source for natives on money earned off reserve?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Anybody that is on the negotiation team for a first nation, or the federal government for that matter, isn't being paid by the province. Typically, the negotiators for the first nations are being paid by those first nations. The first nation in turn is being funded through the B.C. Treaty Commission process, through funding that is a combination of a loan and a grant. The majority of that funding is a loan from the federal government. The province doesn't have any involvement payment of the first nations negotiators' incomes or expenses or otherwise.

[2010]

**B. Simpson:** I just have a few, hopefully, quick questions more by way of an update. If the minister could give an update on the status of the negotiations with the first nations beetle action group, as they negotiate for a portion of the \$100 million to facilitate their own planning and activities around the mountain pine beetle?

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** While the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is providing support to those negotiations, that discussion is being led by the Ministry of Forests and Range. The member best ask those specifics of the Minister of Forests and Range in his estimates.

**B. Simpson:** Would that be the same, then, for first nations participation in the beetle action coalitions as well? What I'm curious about is who is actually monitoring whether or not first nations are participating in that process — the quality and nature of that participation — and, I guess to a certain degree, facilitating meaningful participation in those beetle action coalitions.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Unfortunately, I do have to refer the member to the Minister of Forests and Range.

**S. Fraser:** I'm back. There are six AIPs currently in the province. How many first nations are not involved in the treaty process now? Again, I don't need an exact

number but just a percentage of the 200, give or take, different bands would be appropriate.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Approximately 30 percent of the Indian bands in the province, as defined by the federal government, are not involved in the B.C. Treaty Commission process.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you to the minister for that. Are the resources being spread evenly if first nations are involved in treaty or not? Because of course, a number of first nations have chosen not to go down the path of treaty and have chosen to, for instance, be dealing with the Douglas treaty initiative, as I mentioned before. Is there any loss or inequality in the resources for those first nations not involved in treaty?

[2015]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** If there are resources available through the B.C. Treaty Commission such as loan funds and grant funds to support negotiations, then those are only available, obviously, to the first nations participating in the B.C. Treaty Commission process. In terms of provincial programs and services, there's no distinction there between first nations involved in the treaty process or those that have chosen not to be involved in the treaty process.

Similarly, opportunities such as the Forests and Range opportunities are available to both first nations participating in the treaty negotiations as well as those who have chosen not to. There is some funding available called treaty-related measures to help look at specific issues that first nations may encounter in the context of the Treaty Commission process. That, again, is only available to the first nations that are negotiating treaties, but generally, certainly the government doesn't discriminate against or penalize a first nation for not being involved in the Treaty Commission process. We certainly welcome all first nations to be involved in that process, and we're committed to negotiating with all first nations involved in the process. But we don't penalize anybody for not choosing to participate.

In respect of the ministry's internal resources — the dollars and the FTEs we have within the ministry and the dollars to pay for those FTEs — because so much of our work and so much of our budget are focused on negotiations, by default there are likely more FTEs and dollars applied internally towards the treaty negotiations side. But that is shifting as we pursue the new relationship and look at ways to engage with all first nations.

**S. Fraser:** I thank the minister. Have there been any first nations that have withdrawn from the treaty process?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** There have been, over the years, a small number of first nations that have withdrawn from the treaty process. We would have to go back and review those records to give the member more specifics, but most of that occurred in sort of the late 1990s. I think that — just given where the treaty

process was at — is likely when there was some frustration.

The first nations that have stuck with it remain very committed to the process. From time to time, some first nations that may have formed a group for the negotiation of treaties may have some differences where they choose to reconstitute themselves in a different type of organization, so they'll maybe break apart and then approach the Treaty Commission to be approved to pursue negotiations in a different form. That happens, again, in a relatively small number of situations.

But certainly, I think it is fair to say that in the history of the Treaty Commission process, the vast, vast majority of first nations that have entered the process have pursued it. They're at different stages, but they remain committed to the process.

**S. Fraser:** In November you explained that the ministry was working with the Ministry of Health to develop British Columbia's contribution to a national blueprint. This is on health care. This is on aboriginal health outcomes. I think the goal was to try to raise to average over a decade. Can the minister update us on that? Have there been any positive changes made since that pledge was made?

[2020]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** There have been a number of things that have occurred since November that are indirectly related to the work on this front. Certainly, the transformative change accord that... British Columbia was the only province to sign an accord with the federal government and the first nations leaders coming out of the first ministers meeting. That accord sets out a number of issues around improving health outcomes and commits us all to developing an implementation strategy over the course of the 2006 calendar year. We're in the process of doing that and trying to bring some focus to that and our work with the First Nations Leadership Council so that we can then engage better with the federal government on that front.

I think it's fair to say that there has been a bit of a delay in our ability to move some of that work forward simply by virtue of there having been a federal election, and as is very much the case, we need to have effective discussion with the federal government. Certainly, as I think I indicated early in the estimates, I'm very encouraged by both my own and the Premier's meeting with Minister Prentice and the opportunities that are there to work closely with the federal government in moving the transformative change accord forward. The health aspects of that accord are certainly consistent with the blueprint, as I understand it.

**S. Fraser:** Thank you to the minister for that. Does the ministry have a budget item for capacity-building within the Ministry of Health in the new relationship? I mean, is there a specific amount put aside for that?

I raise this. We have seen out at the Prince George conferences and that, that the rate of diabetes, for instance, amongst aboriginal communities is very high.

It's three to five times higher, I think, than the average. It was explained how first nations were more susceptible to diabetes but not getting tested for diabetes — which is, I think, a fundamental flaw — and other problems. The health workers are not making it up to the northern or more remote aboriginal communities. Is the ministry taking a leadership role in addressing this sort of thing? If so, again, how much is budgeted for this?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation doesn't have a budget allocation in that regard. It would be better for the member to ask that of the Ministry of Health in terms of their overall budget and to what extent they're able to designate or advise the member as to what's designated specifically for aboriginal health.

I think there was a definite recognition in the discussions around the first ministers meeting that additional dollars needed to be available specifically to address some of the challenges around diabetes, some of the challenges around substance abuse and some mental health issues.

In the transformative change accord, specifically, we've set out a number of things that we think need to be done to try and close the gap. Those include establishing mental health programs to address substance abuse and youth suicide; integrating the ActNow strategy with first nations health programs to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases like diabetes; and certainly, increasing the number of first nations trained health care professionals.

There are some specific items that have been identified. We're now working with the Ministry of Health to see how we implement those. Part of that, too, as I indicated, though, is our desire and need to bring the federal government into the picture, given their primary role in health matters on reserve. We need to be well-integrated with the federal government.

To be fair, in all the discussions, the federal government recognizes that too. We just need to move that work forward.

[2025]

**S. Fraser:** I understand what the minister is saying. I know it's difficult to get.... I guess I'm looking for more tangibles here, and it's elusive.

When I or any of my colleagues ask of the individual ministries now what resources, what they've budgeted towards affecting the new relationship.... I'm not talking about what's in the budget to deal with — if there is a line item somewhere for aboriginal issues. There's a new relationship, so presumably that has to show some sort of a change. What I'm having a hard time finding is anything tangible there. There seems to be a disconnect along the horizontal plane in the ministries.

This is the lead ministry in the new relationship, and we've certainly heard the minister talk about working with the leadership council, and that's fair enough. There are capacity problems within first na-

tions. That's fair enough. There are attempts to address that. I'll pull out some that I've worked on in the House.

Dealing with the Ministry of Environment, we've dealt with Hul'qumi'num treaty group letter to the minister, and I raised it in the House. The minister was present here. The Minister of Environment was talking about the spraying of herbicides and pesticides on traditional territories with no consultation. Same thing with the Qualicum First Nation — same issue. No consultation and no real acknowledgement from the minister involved that there was anything wrong with that. It flies in the face of the words and the spirit and the intent of the new relationship.

With mining it's been the same. Amazay is a lake up in the interior. It's Duncan Lake, as it's called. *Amazay* means "mother caribou" in the native tongue. There are five, I believe, first nations that have historic first nations traditional territories on the lake. The lake is going through a process likely to destroy it. It is going to be filled with acid tailings. That process is going ahead despite all five first nations saying no. I think the Assembly of First Nations, also, and one of the members of the leadership council, are saying no. All of them have said no at this point. Yet the ministries are still continuing as though nothing has changed. So there's a disconnect here, whether it's for health, environment, mining. We've already determined that with forestry and education.

The ministries don't understand the new relationship. The public doesn't understand the new relationship. To a large extent, the first nations aren't seeing any new relationship, and they aren't getting any information from the ministry. The public is getting very little. I get more information from the publications coming out of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs on the new relationship than I do, ever, from the ministry.

I don't mean to keep harping on each individual ministry, but I must make it clear. Where is this ministry providing the resources as the lead for the new relationship? Where are the resources to make the new relationship happen on the ground within government?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I think if the member is looking to identify tangible results by attaching that to a dollar figure in a ministry budget, then yes, he's going to have difficulty doing that. I think if we look at changing the way government does things and say that any change has to then be identified by a line item in the budget, we're never going to see change. The reality is that across government, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation is working with each ministry in their day-to-day business of making decisions and trying to ensure, and each ministry is trying to ensure, that it's meeting its consultation obligations as set out in the Haida and Taku River decisions.

I would disagree with the member's assertion that ministries aren't out there consulting with first nations. Certainly, that's not been my experience. There are significant consultations ongoing on a number of fronts right across the province. In respect of there being a

new consultation and accommodation framework in place, which is one of the goals of the new relationship, no, we're not there yet.

[2030]

There is work still to be done, and we're doing that work with the leadership council. That is work, I think it's fair to say, that is frustrating for everybody involved at one time or another. But we'll continue to persevere there, and at the point that we come to conclusion in terms of doing that work, we'll then implement that across government, and where necessary, ministries would then be expected to change the way they are currently doing business to take into account that new, agreed-upon consultation and accommodation framework.

The new relationship isn't just about that particular piece. The new relationship is about embarking upon a conversation with first nations, primarily through the leadership council but beyond that as well, on a whole host of fronts. I would argue very strenuously that the transformative change accord and the work of the first ministers meeting — and indeed, the months of work that was done by officials within my ministry and officials within Education, within Health, within other ministries across government in the lead-up to the first ministers meeting — was all about a new relationship, where we were talking with the leadership council, with representatives from the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, the First Nations Summit and the Assembly of First Nations about what it was that they expected to come out of the first ministers meeting and how we as a provincial government could assist in meeting those goals.

Rather than the provincial government stepping back, saying, "What is it we the province want to get out of this?" and "Let's just go ahead," we were working very collaboratively with the first nations leadership in order to have a common front at the first ministers meeting. I think that's what brought us the results of the transformative change accord.

Is that the end? By no means. It's a significant starting point, though, in building the collaborative work necessary to approach the federal government, get them engaged in collaborating with the province and the first nations leadership so that we can finally — after decades, quite frankly — start to make real progress in addressing these shameful gaps that exist in health, in education, in economic opportunity between aboriginal and non-aboriginal British Columbians.

There's no question that there's a great deal of work still to do. But there is significant incremental change that is occurring within government. This is the type of thing that in the absence of, perhaps, a few examples like the new consultation and accommodation framework, there won't be the big bangs that are a great big announceable that everybody can say: "Okay, that's what the new relationship is about." It will, rather, be a series of incremental changes within government that really are symptomatic of the simple fact that a true new relationship evolves, and it takes work on the part of all parties. But it really is an evolution in how we do business together.

**S. Fraser:** I appreciate what the minister is saying. I support the new relationship, and I applaud the work that's being done. I think the leadership council has done a great job. I would venture to say that the minister is doing a good job too. But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about....

This is a new initiative. If you introduce a new initiative and you expect it in any meaningful way to be effective, it costs. It requires capacity-building. This is an issue, if there ever was one, which requires that within ministries.

Ministries have been cut by this government over the last five years extensively, and there are difficulties in the ministries affecting the jobs they already have. Hats off to our ministry workers. I'm not faulting them here, but they're having a hard time just maintaining.

When you introduce a new relationship, and there are no resources going.... If it's not coming from the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and if you ask the actual ministers in the other ministries what extra resources they're putting towards the new relationship, there are none. They're referring us back to this ministry as being the lead. I understand that there has been work done on the accord and on the new relationship and on the trust and all that. I understand that. But the ministries.... There has been no reflection of the new relationship in any budgetary changes in any tangible way in government. In some cases it seems to be worse.

[2035]

We saw it in the Ministry of Children and Family Development when there was an attempt to implement the kith-and-kin agreement and there was actually a cut of resources. There were no extra resources given to implement a very important new strategy. There has to be; otherwise, it's just words. There's no meat on the bones. So I'm trying to find that meat on the bones. There are good words. I don't fault the minister there.

All right, then. Upper management in the ministries — they're very busy. I understand that. And it's a given that the horizontal issues take a back seat here on specific ministry priorities. You've cited meetings with executives, executive staff and productive work relating to furthering the new relationship at the deputy minister levels or whatever. I'm assuming, then, that meetings between ADMs and deputy ministers regarding aboriginal policy do occur between the ministries, even if there are no specific budget items around that. Is that something new? Didn't that happen before the new relationship?

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The short answer to the member's question is: yes, prior to the new relationship initiative there were interministry initiatives within government. But in terms of the ones that staff from this ministry would have been involved in — it would have been prior to this ministry being formed — in their previous capacities, they were primarily treaty-related in terms of the interministry reflection on what's happening at the treaty table and what the implications are for different departments across government. There was some work within aboriginal ser-

vices on the social side when they were in Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services but, certainly, not near the degree of work and coordination that is occurring now.

As I indicated in my previous, relatively long-winded answer, I recognize the member's frustration in wanting to say: okay, here's the new relationship; here is the budget for it. The reality is that ministries across government are doing their business, as they have for a number of years. What the new relationship is fundamentally about is changing how that business is done.

It's a case of ministries looking at: okay, when I am making decisions, what are the obligations that are there with respect to first nations, and how do I approach those obligations in a respectful manner and in a spirit of finding a common interest? That's a fundamental shift for government, to look at our relationship with first nations as being a cooperative and collaborative one looking for common interests as best we can.

There are going to be issues that there is disagreement on, and certainly, there are going to be accusations, I suspect, where the government is not acting in the spirit of the new relationship. Over time we're going to have to be continuously working on those issues. I think, fundamentally, what the new relationship becomes is realigning within ministries how we're doing things to ensure that we're working more collaboratively with first nations and addressing first nations issues in a fair and effective way.

[2040]

I think — as an example, in terms of the new relationship in action — one need only look to the province's response and the work being led by the Minister of Forests and Range around the mountain pine beetle plan. Five years ago the mountain pine beetle would have been addressed without a second thought to first nations, I suspect it's fair to say, unfortunately. Now there's considerable engagement with first nations. The province assisted with the sponsorship of a mountain pine beetle forum last fall to bring first nations that were impacted by the mountain pine beetle together to try and recognize the impacts there and, subsequently, to work with a group of first nations chiefs that are directly impacted by the mountain pine beetle on the development of the province's response to mountain pine beetle.

While those discussions continue — and I suspect everybody involved doesn't think they have the perfect response yet — the reality is that for the first time ever there is significant responsive engagement with the first nations around trying to attack that problem which, there is no question, has a very significant impact on first nations, just as it has a very significant impact on non-aboriginal British Columbians who live in a good-sized piece of this province.

**S. Fraser:** I attended, I believe with our Forests critic, the first nations aboriginal conference in the Lheidli T'enneh traditional territory in Prince George on the pine beetle. During that conference this government made announcements about results of that consultation. I suspect... I have a bit of a problem with

that being brought up anyway. I just heard the Forests critic ask questions about how that's going and specific details of whether or not that's effective consultation — if that's continuing; if it was done properly; are there any checks and balances to make sure that is happening? The minister deferred it to the Minister of Forests and Range. I don't think it's appropriate to bring that up now as an example.

We're close to the end here, but I'd like to ask the minister: in this province there are the majority of aboriginal peoples in Canada — is it 60 percent? We have a large percentage of aboriginal people in this province compared to the country. What's the aboriginal population in B.C.? I estimate it somewhere at 200,000. Tell me if I'm in the ballpark here.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** It's approximately 200,000 individuals within the province.

**S. Fraser:** So I was close. In the FRAs, the FROs, we've seen a formula based on a head count for compensation for forest resource use. Somewhere around \$500 per head, I think, is the way the formula works out. No matter how many times it goes back to a negotiation, when it gets to cabinet, it seems to stick to that formula.

I don't have my calculator, but we have about 200,000 aboriginal people in B.C. looking for relationship-building and reconciliation. We have \$100 million on the table as the only tangible I've been able to find so far in these estimates. Good intentions — yes. Good words — yes. That works out to, I believe, about \$500 a head. Is that the price of reconciliation? Is that what we're dealing with here? Has this come down to a formula? If there's no money going into the ministries to effect a new relationship... The ministries aren't allotting any resources, specifically, towards a new relationship. Then we have an uncanny number here that seems to be coming back to us. Has there been a price slated per head for a new relationship in B.C. by this government?

[2045]

**Hon. T. Christensen:** The short answer is no. The path of reconciliation is, perhaps, a long one. It is about a host of efforts across government on the economic front, on the social front, on the cultural front, to try and finally recognize the contributions of aboriginal people to the province historically, presently and in the future, and about truly reconciling what has been a dysfunctional relationship between the province and first nations over the course of a century and a half.

I guess the cynic in me suggests that if we could put a price on that, that might make it easier. Then we could just figure out a way to buy it. You can't buy it; you have to build it. That is what we are attempting to do. We're starting from the ground up, and we're pursuing a path of reconciliation with first nations. We're doing that in concert with the First Nations Leadership Council.

There is no question we'll have bumps along the road as we pursue that path. We'll have points of disagreement. But I think what we're fundamentally do-

ing is learning how to work together, recognizing where our interests are common and how we can do that work to better the standard of living for people in first nations communities across the province and improve the standard of living, the health and education outcomes, the opportunities to participate in today's economy for aboriginal people, and in the course of doing that, actually end up with a province that is better for all British Columbians.

That's a long-term goal, and I recognize the member's frustration in terms of not being able to align this dollar with that potential result. But the reality is that we're in the early part of the discussion in terms of how we're going to achieve those long-term results. We're working more closely than ever before in the province with first nations leadership to go down that path together. As we identify specific initiatives that we can undertake and the resources necessary to pursue those specific initiatives, then I'll be more than happy to make the announcements around those things and to ensure that the member is well aware of exactly what the explicit details of those arrangements are.

I think the other thing that is very clear in this area of public policy is that there is a very significant role for the federal government. We've been somewhat disrupted in this path, given that we've had a federal election and the time that that takes and the time it takes for a new government to get their feet wet and decide how they want to approach issues. But as I have said, I'm very encouraged by the meetings we've had with the federal minister and look forward to pursuing a range of matters with the federal government to ensure that we are working hand-in-hand — federal, provincial, and the first nations — to ensure we reach those goals of closing those gaps and actually pursue a true path of reconciliation.

**S. Fraser:** I know the time, so if I may, I will prepare to close here.

I thank the minister for that. I'm mindful of the challenges of the ministry and in dealing with many, many years' worth of reconciliation that has to come out of this. This is in the best interests of all British Columbians, to bring certainty to British Columbians, to the economy and to bring parity back, where it has been lost. There are many facets to this. I'm mindful of the difficulties on this.

I can offer a few suggestions. As long as we're not seeing any meat on the bones, you are still going to be hearing from me as an opposition critic. This side of the House will expect to get some information. The public needs some information. I mentioned earlier: we're not getting any information. I mean, I learned that the ministry is planning to hold monthly meetings for four months to advance the new relationship. I read about that in the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs' e-update.

[2050]

There was nothing posted on the ministry's website, so there has been no outreach here to the public. There have been no resources allotted from pre-new relationship to post-new relationship to the individual ministries in capacity-building — or to making it avail-

able for the line ministries to know what this new relationship means.

As long as that happens, we're not going to have a new relationship. We're going to have a lot of talking about a new relationship. They're going to have a lot of words about a new relationship. But something substantive and some leadership has to be taken at a different level, on a concrete level.

Please ensure that the public is informed about this. There's a big gap there. There's not just a gap between the ministries and the line ministry people or this ministry and other ministries. There's a lack of information in general. I would suggest respectfully that that be updated, maybe through your website. I'm not sure what, but we need more information. The public needs more information.

With that, I thank you, minister, and your staff. I know this is a challenging time, and we got through it.

Vote 10: ministry operations, \$28,778,000 — approved.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I move the committee rise and report resolution and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 8:52 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Committee of Supply (Section B), having reported resolution, was granted leave to sit again.

Committee of Supply (Section A), having reported progress, was granted leave to sit again.

Hon. C. Richmond moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

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## PROCEEDINGS IN THE DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

### Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF  
AGRICULTURE AND LANDS

(continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A); H. Bloy in the chair.

The committee met at 3:11 p.m.

On Vote 12: ministry operations, \$84,868,000 (*continued*).

**S. Simpson:** I'm looking at the outset to go through a number of questions related to species at risk and the activity of the government related to that.

I'd like to start with maybe asking about last year's service plan. When I look on page 55 of last year's service plan on performance measures, 3.1, it said that the submission to government of a scientifically credible and defensible approach to the management and recovery of species at risk in B.C. was the objective of government, and the target was to have that completed by March 31, 2006.

Could the minister tell us what the status of that work is?

[1515]

**Hon. P. Bell:** As the member knows, there are three species at risk that my ministry has the responsibility of establishing recovery plans for — those being the marbled murrelet, the mountain caribou and the spotted owl. So I'll just go through where we're at on each one of those three files. Hopefully, that will answer the member's question.

On marbled murrelet. We've been doing some modelling for terrestrial habitat. It is a bit complicated because we are working jointly with the federal government on that particular file. That's slowed down the file a bit, but it is moving along, and we'll continue to work through that process in the spring.

On mountain caribou. As the member, I think, is aware, we have posted on the SaRCO website a series of options and different opportunities that are available for mountain caribou recovery. We're currently receiving input on what's been posted to this point in time. We'll be reviewing that input with the science panel and then coming forward with the final strategy over the next number of months.

With spotted owl. We're probably most advanced with our recovery strategies around spotted owl. We've been doing a lot of work, particularly on that species. I would think that the member will be hearing something within the next few weeks as to our recovery strategy around spotted owl.

**S. Simpson:** I appreciate that. When I look at the performance measures, I think 3.2 actually identified the need for a specific number of recovery plans. When I read the comment around the performance measure, it says, "This measure addresses the number of completed, provincial priority species-at-risk recovery plans brought forward to government for decision-making. The priorities for '05-06 are to complete coordinated recovery plans for the mountain caribou, northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet" — which are the comments, I believe, that the minister was just making.

That's what 3.2 says. It said that these three would be developed in '05-06, and then it mentions "to be developed" as targets for the subsequent two years.

When I go back to the first question that I asked the minister, it said: can the minister then tell me what the difference is in terms of the interpretation of this performance measure? What the minister is telling me is essentially, I believe, the answer to 3.2.

What is 3.1? I'll mention it again: "The submission to government of a scientifically credible and defensible approach to the management and recovery of species at risk in B.C." It seems like a more global question, but I won't interpret for the minister. Maybe he could tell me what that means in relation to the other answer.  
[1520]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I believe the question is: what is the difference between 3.1 and 3.2? Three point one is not species-specific, so it's submission to government of an approach for management and recovery of species at risk in B.C., versus 3.2, which is specific to the three species that we talked about earlier.

**S. Simpson:** When I read the 2006 strategic plan, there's a reference in the strategic plan to new species-at-risk law for British Columbia to be developed some time over the next year and a half or two years. I'm not sure what the timing is, because I believe that strategic plan covers a couple of years, and it makes reference to a new law for species at risk in the strategic plan. My question to the minister is: is 3.1 a precursor, in terms of information to be provided to government, as some early steps in the development of that new species-at-risk law that's referenced in the 2006 strategic plan?

**Hon. P. Bell:** That particular piece of legislation would be the responsibility of the Minister of Environment. I'm sure the Minister of Environment would consider any work that has been done in the preparation of that piece of legislation, but this work is not being done specific to that piece of legislation. So if there are questions pertaining to the legislation, they'd be better canvassed under the Minister of Environment. I'm sure the minister will consider the work that's gone on in the past in the development of that legislation.

**S. Simpson:** I appreciate that. Maybe the minister could clarify for me, because I know that the Minister of Agriculture and Lands and the Minister of Environment both have had pieces of species at risk — under the integrated land management bureau — in terms of the habitat issue and then the question of enforcement and that, and they've been different. I also believe that the Minister of Agriculture and Lands is currently the lead minister on species-at-risk matters, as the SaRCO office falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands.

So is this a change that we're seeing here — that in fact the legislation would come under the Minister of Environment and not under the Minister of Agriculture and Lands? Is that a change in the government's position?



[1525]

**Hon. P. Bell:** It is easy, I suppose, to get confused over where the different responsibilities lie, but I'll give it a try.

The species-at-risk coordination office, which is located under the integrated land management bureau, which reports through to me, has responsibility for the recovery strategies of the three species that we've mentioned already today — northern spotted owl, mountain caribou and marbled murrelet — and, in addition, for the scientific work that's necessary in order to create the work that's necessary for a global recovery strategy for species.

The Ministry of Environment has responsibility for all the legislation as it pertains to species at risk. If there were other recovery strategies being done — other than northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet and mountain caribou — they would reside in the Ministry of Environment.

I'll just explain, perhaps, some of the reasoning, because that may answer the next question. The integrated land management bureau has responsibility for land use planning, cumulative impacts and everything that's associated with that. That clearly impacts how you will plan and develop a recovery strategy for species at risk. The SaRCO office was assigned the three most prominent species at this point, to develop plans and strategies around and to take that forward, while the remainder falls still in the Ministry of Environment.

**S. Simpson:** Thanks to the minister for that. We'll maybe talk about that a little bit more. But for now, maybe what the minister could do is tell me: what is the budget for the SaRCO office?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The budget for this year is \$1.2 million, and that's up from \$626,000 last year.

**S. Simpson:** Could the minister tell me what the reasoning for the doubling of the budget is and where that money is going to be expended?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I think I introduced staff previously, but my Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands Larry Pedersen; my associate deputy for the integrated land management bureau Mike Lambert; and Kevin Jardine, who is the.... Director?

**A Voice:** Assistant deputy minister.

**Hon. P. Bell:** Assistant deputy minister — sorry — with responsibility for the SaRCO office as well.

I'll just walk the member through the specifics of the lift. There is a communications budget that has three parts to it. The first is communications with stakeholders for \$20,000. We'd be happy to provide this to you if you want. The general public communications, \$15,000; first nations, \$50,000.

Under recovery actions for mountain caribou, there will be complete population and habitat modelling of

\$75,000; a caribou coordinator for \$75,000 — a staff person; first nations consultation at \$50,000.

[1530]

For spotted owl, the first nations consultation of \$50,000. For marbled murrelet: inventory, \$50,000; critical habitat identification, \$25,000; options development, \$40,000. Then in the policy development department, an additional \$50,000. We'd be happy to provide that to the member.

**S. Simpson:** I appreciate the offer, and I would appreciate a breakdown, maybe, of the budget of the SaRCO office generally. It would be a good thing.

This lift is here for this year. Is it the intention that the lift will stay in place in subsequent years, or will the budget be reduced again?

**Hon. P. Bell:** There is a lift that is ongoing, but some of it is reduced because some of that work, as I've articulated, is one-time work that would happen — first nations consultation, as an example. Presumably you would do that. It wouldn't be required. So the budget drops to \$710,000 in '07-08 and is \$710,000 for '08-09 as well.

**S. Simpson:** Could the minister tell us what the thinking is around the role of the SaRCO office over and above these three specific species? As the minister will know, depending on who you talk to and in what range, there are an awful lot of species that are to some degree considered to be at risk in the province. I understand there is this term about globally significant species and that these three are identified as being in that category. I would anticipate that there were other species in British Columbia that might also at some point qualify as globally significant, depending on their status.

My question to the minister is: as he sees this new legislation that I appreciate is being driven by the Ministry of Environment.... The SaRCO office has these three species that it's doing work on now, and we'll talk a little bit about the recovery plans that are in place or are in progress — the planning for. But what is the thinking about what the role of the SaRCO office is, longer term?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The role is actually in the name: species-at-risk coordination office. So the role of SaRCO, on an ongoing basis, will be in the coordination and the cross-cutting and bringing together of all ministries in the development of strategic plans around species at risk. In the long term we see the role as a coordinating office.

As the member probably has thought about at some point in time or another, there are many ministries that impact the recovery of any species — whether it's the Ministry of Forests, Energy and Mines, Environment, Transportation or the Agriculture component of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. So it is necessary to have a coordinating office that pulls together all of the necessary strategies for recovery of species, and that would be the long-term role.

**S. Simpson:** Maybe we'll go to a slightly different place, and maybe the minister could tell me whether this is work that the SaRCO office would play a role in or whether this would maybe fall totally under Environment. I'll take those questions there later in the session.

There are a number of species, and I would be interested to know what the ministry's determination of species at risk is — numbers of species that are at risk, particularly those that might fall under globally significant species. Over and above the three that are on the list in British Columbia, are there other species that the ministry has identified as potentially at risk or maybe not yet to be flagged, but there. If so, which would they be?

[1535]

**Hon. P. Bell:** This is a fairly complex issue in terms of: how do you determine global significance? Let me start out by trying this and see if I'm answering the member's question.

Currently in B.C. there are 134 species that are listed under the federal Species at Risk Act. There is a total of 1,364 species listed by the provincial conservation data centre as being at risk.

The three that we are focusing on in this ministry are the ones that are considered to be, in our estimation, the most globally significant — the ones that we want to try and deal with as quickly as possible. That's why they were assigned this specific task in the SaRCO office to recover those three species.

**S. Simpson:** Could the minister tell us who makes the determination of what is a globally significant species?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I was afraid the member was going to ask that question, because that's what makes this very complex. There are a number of different listing agencies around the world that all claim ownership to determining what is globally significant and what isn't globally significant. One way, perhaps, of looking at this would be that the 134 species listed by the Species at Risk Act could be considered to be globally significant.

The reason — and I'm anticipating the member's next question — why we're focusing on the three that I've commented on here today is because they are quite wide-ranging in habitation. It's important that land use planning play a key role in the recovery strategy around those three particular species. Many of the other 134 species are over a much smaller range, not as broad-ranging, and land use planning doesn't come into play as being a key component of the strategy that you would use to recover the species.

[1540]

I think the answer is: the determination of whether it is globally significant or not is largely qualitative, not quantitative. The reason why we're focused on the three particular species is the nature of the area that they inhabit.

**S. Simpson:** So, to be clear here, because I think I understood that, but I'll try again: there isn't a criterion that's internationally accepted — or accepted by the national government, by the United Nations or by whoever that might be — that says: "Here's the criteria for determining global significance of a species at risk." There are a number of factors that the ministry might consider, but it is the ministry's decision on what global significance is here when they consider a number of other factors. Or is there a specific criterion that we could measure some of those 134 species against and say that we understand why these three were chosen and 128, or whatever it is, weren't?

**Hon. P. Bell:** There is a database that is housed by the Ministry of Environment that is called the conservation data centre or the CDC. In the CDC the member would note that there are species that have a G ranking.

[1545]

The G ranking indicates that a species is globally rare, and global rarity would certainly be an indicator of its significance for recovery. I'm going to try and answer.... No, I'll leave it at that. I was going to try and answer your next question.

**S. Simpson:** Well, I'm glad the minister was going to try. I'm not exactly sure what the next question was, so there we go. I actually was going to move a little bit to another area.

The G ranking. So is the minister saying that the determination that is made is based on those animals within the conservation data centre, within that database, that have a G ranking? That's how the ministry decides which ones SaRCO will put on its list? If so, can the minister tell us what animals or species have the G ranking?

**Hon. P. Bell:** That was the question I was going to answer, so I guess we're getting on the same wave-length here.

The decision to identify the three species that SaRCO is specifically focused on was made by cabinet. The rest of the species that are considered globally significant are not being ignored. Their recovery plans and recovery strategies are being developed by the Minister of Environment. The reason why the three species that the SaRCO office is working on were chosen is because of their broad range and the fact that land use planning plays a significant role in the recovery strategies.

**S. Simpson:** Well, I'll talk to the Minister of Environment, when I get that opportunity, about some of those. Let's go back and just ask a couple of specific questions in relation to two of the three species. The first is the caribou. Can the minister tell us what the status of the recovery plan is right now with the caribou?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Currently, as the member will know, the consultation document is on the SaRCO website. It

has been there for some length of time. The scientific team is just completing their work right now, and we have started to engage in first nations consultation. We've completed consultations with the Da'naxda'xw, and we're moving on and starting to consult with other first nations who have territories in the range of the mountain caribou.

**S. Simpson:** I believe the minister said that the scientific team is just finishing up its work. What is the intention? What's the minister's intention in terms of releasing recommendations of the scientific team, and when does he anticipate those recommendations being released?

**Hon. P. Bell:** All of the information that the scientific team is preparing will be made public. It will go up on the website in the range of two to three months — in that time frame. The final recommendations will, of course, be taken to cabinet for a decision.

[1550]

**S. Simpson:** Is the minister, then, saying that we're going to see that we can anticipate the body of work from the scientific team being a body of data but not necessarily with recommendations from the team that suggest certain actions be taken or not taken?

As we know, when the document first became somewhat public, there was the question of the small herds and what the options around small herds were. There's public concern and concern on this side of the House about whether those herds of less than ten animals or not and what would be done with them and what the strategy would be...

I appreciate that the work is ongoing, but can we expect that we will be able to understand what the scientific team is suggesting should occur in the material that will be released, or will that piece of the material go to cabinet and not be made public?

**Hon. P. Bell:** What we expect a scientific team to produce is a list of recommendations of the types of actions that can be taken to recover the species. Those will be made public, and then cabinet will make a decision on the basis of the list of strategies that are brought forward.

**S. Simpson:** Does the minister anticipate a process of public discussion after the scientific team's recommendations are made public and there is this additional information for community interest, whether they be specific stakeholder groups or others, to make comment? What will the process around consultation be, based on the scientific team's recommendations, so the ministry and the government — and cabinet, for that matter — have the benefit of that information and that knowledge, considering that it's, hopefully, going to be based on a new body of information that is going to be science-based? That's always best place to start, it seems to me, with these matters.

**Hon. P. Bell:** In fact, we are effectively out consulting with first nations right now and receiving the input on the body of work that the scientific panel is completing right now. We anticipate that it would continue. The document will go up on the website. We would anticipate that there would be public comment coming in as a result of that Web posting as well.

There have been literally hundreds of comments made already as a result of the posting of the first document. I don't want to prejudice the nature of that work and suggest either that there would be the requirement for an expansive further consultative process or that perhaps there wouldn't be. I think we want to allow the process to unfold.

Once the scientific panel document is up on the website, it would be fair at that point to make a determination on whether there is extensive further work required or if it can move through more quickly. But it will be a public document, and I'm sure the public will be more than open with government as to whether there's further work required.

[1555]

**S. Simpson:** I believe, and I can certainly be corrected, that there have been some interim measures put in place at the recommendation of SaRCO in terms of deferring on some timber and recreational activities in the areas that are in question. It's my understanding that those interim measures will expire in September, I believe. Is it the minister's expectation that those interim measures will be continued until such time as cabinet has made a decision and a plan is in place?

The concern here, obviously, is that it may take longer than September for the science team to complete its work and for cabinet to complete its deliberations and then for any implementation of post-cabinet decisions on what should actually occur. I worry about the gap between September and when that time might be.

Can the minister make a commitment that he would make a recommendation, at least, to cabinet on continuing those interim measures that have been put in place until such time as that plan is moved forward?

[L. Mayencourt in the chair.]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I think the decision the member is referring to is a section 16 Land Act reserve of over about a million hectares in the Kootenays that restricts any expansion of commercial recreation tenure. That would be the one that expires in September this year.

That particular reserve was put in place to give some breathing room and allow the species-at-risk co-ordination office to do the work that was necessary without feeling unduly pressured with regards to the activities that were going on. Should we not complete the work by September, certainly we would contemplate extending that for the same reasons that we put it in place in the first place.

**S. Simpson:** As the minister points out, this interim moratorium, or whatever we choose to call it, essen-

tially covered the southern portion of the recovery area, more so. Can the minister tell us why the decision was made that it would cover that portion and not cover the complete area?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Most challenged herds are in that particular part of the region. There are other herds, which were actually canvassed in this debate last week, that are doing very well. The herds that are the most challenged are the ones that are covered by the million hectares that the section 16 reserve is in place for.

**S. Simpson:** I do have other questions related to that, but we have some time constraints here, and I'm going to leave that.

I have just a couple of quick questions that relate to the spotted owl. Could the minister tell us: what is the status of the management strategy at present for the owl? We know there has been discussion around captive breeding — around a number of options. There obviously has been discussion around protecting certain areas. I wonder if the minister could tell us what the current status of the plan is.

Particularly, if the minister could reference some of the questions around a bit of a situation that happened, I guess, in November of last year, when there was suggestion by the company — Cattermole, I believe it was — which had received a cutblock and was looking to go back in and begin to cut again in the area that is designated as a spotted owl area.

Maybe he could tell us where all that is at, at the moment.

[1600]

**Hon. P. Bell:** Earlier in my remarks when I referred to the spotted owl, I indicated that the recovery strategy around the spotted owl was moving along very nicely. I anticipated some public comment in the not so distant future, and I think I have to leave it at that in terms of the specific strategy.

What I can comment on.... The member referred to the spotted owl management plan in an area of 363,000 hectares that are in a number of different TSAs located in the area defined by approximately Boston Bar, Lillooet, Pemberton, down through the Fraser Valley. In that area there was an application, as the member quite rightly points out, that went through the normal processes. It was refined, I gather, many times over. The Minister of Forests would be better able to identify for the member exactly how that all kind of developed.

In the 363,000 hectares that are defined as spotted owl management plan area right now, you are still allowed to harvest timber in the area, but it's under a far more restrictive regime than it is anywhere else in the province in terms of the values that are placed on spotted owl.

What I can tell the member is that I'm quite confident that the strategy is moving along in an orderly fashion, and I think we will have some good news that we'll be able to talk about in the not too distant future.

**S. Simpson:** I'll accept that, just with the question: when might we expect the release of significant information about that plan so that those of us on the opposition benches and, more importantly actually, the public will get an opportunity to see the substantive pieces of that plan and to make comments?

Sort of as a second piece of that question: is it the minister's expectation that this will be a final plan, or is this a plan that's going to be out there looking for feedback and comments that may allow it to be adjusted or amended based on what the minister hears from the public and others?

**Hon. P. Bell:** To answer the first question: soon. To answer the second question: it will be a recovery strategy that will have a series of different sorts of activities that will take place.

We are always eager to hear from the public any considerations that we may not have viewed. If it's deemed necessary, we would have a flexibility in that plan to look at other options as well. There's been lots of work done on spotted owl, and we are reasonably confident that we have a strategy that will work effectively.

[1605]

**J. Horgan:** It's a pleasure to be here in Agriculture and Lands estimates again this year. I want to, at the outset, thank the minister and his staff for all of the work they do 12 months of the year to promote this very important sector of our economy. My constituency of Malahat-Juan de Fuca, the South Cowichan portion of the Cowichan Valley — the former breadbasket of the Island, certainly, if not the province — depends heavily on the sector, and I know the minister and his staff are aware of that.

I would like to say, then, that from questions from our side of the House, questions from processors, questions from small producers, the minister has revisited the meat-processing regulations and the health regulations from last year. I haven't had an opportunity to review them in detail, but early indications are that they certainly go at least some distance towards assuaging some of the fears and concerns in my community.

I'll take a good, hard look at it over the next number of days. I don't think I'll have time to participate vigorously in a debate in these estimates on that subject, as a result of time, but I wanted the minister to know that I appreciate the efforts that he and his ministry have taken to address this issue. If it doesn't go far enough, he can be assured that he'll hear from me.

The issue that I want to take the time discussing in the moments that I have available is the Agricultural Land Commission and the agricultural land reserve. I apologize to staff for not saying that at the outset, as people move in and move out.

Also within my community, not just the South Cowichan, Cobble Hill and the various farm and agricultural communities in the region, but also the district of Langford.... The minister will be aware that there is a significant amount of controversy brewing in Langford with respect to a portion of the community called

south Langford. An official community plan is being redrafted, and a blanket request for removal from the agricultural land reserve is pending. This is a theoretical question at this point, but as I understand it, the district of Langford will be making an application for those landowners who ask for it. I'm wondering if the minister has heard about that and if he has any comments.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I have not, but I always have comment on any question as it pertains to the Agricultural Land Commission. I'll just be absolutely clear on my position and this government's position as they relate to the Agricultural Land Commission. We do not believe in politically interfering with decisions made by the Land Commission. We think it operates best as a quasi-judicial branch of government and that decisions that are made are made at arm's length from government. In fact, that's how we've approached it all the way along.

We are very proud of the record that we have in this government in terms of the reduced number of... Land that comes out of the agricultural land reserve has been reduced significantly — about half of what it was on an annualized basis through the 1990s. We have had significant additions because this government has seen fit to create a policy framework that allows this to occur to land in the agricultural land reserve. In fact, the agricultural land reserve is at an all-time high today, higher than ever before.

We're very proud of the work that's been done. We resist vigorously anyone who would attempt to have us engage in the decisions on the agricultural land reserve. We think that those decisions are best made at arm's length from government.

**J. Horgan:** Certainly, the agricultural land reserve is religion for those of us on this side of the House, and it certainly is religion for me. The concerns in my community at present revolve around a letter that was sent to 84 landowners in the community by the district of Langford, offering up the services of the district for a blanket removal of lands from the ALR through the ALC. Now that the minister has staff available, could he advise me if he's heard of this and what his views would be?

[1610]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm joined by Colin Fry, who is with the Agricultural Land Commission as well.

The application has not been received by the Agricultural Land Commission to date. We are aware that there is some work being done by local government. But let's be clear on this. Regardless of whether Langford applied on behalf of different landowners or each of the landowners applied individually, the rules for removal are identical. There is no particular advantage to Langford applying on behalf of everyone, as opposed to individual landowners.... The rules that would apply for exclusion and the demonstrated need that would be required are identical.

It is not an active file with the Agricultural Land Commission, as I understand it.

**J. Horgan:** I thank the minister and his staff for that answer. In his experience or his staff's has there been any similar application by a district for multiple landowners?

**Hon. P. Bell:** We're not aware of anything that has worked in exactly the way Langford is proposing — as the member has indicated — to apply here. One that would be somewhat similar would be in Mission. Mission was looking at a general OCP review that would have included a significant amount of agricultural land for inclusion for industrial activity and other types of activities. They were working with the Agricultural Land Commission, and the Agricultural Land Commission indicated that, had that gone forward, the applications most likely would have been declined. So Mission decided not to pursue that any further.

**J. Horgan:** Could the minister advise the committee if Langford has approached the ALC with their application in general terms at this point?

**Hon. P. Bell:** No, they haven't.

**J. Horgan:** I appreciate the minister's position on this issue. I share that, that the commission will make its decision based on science and based on the value of the land, the ability for it to produce food, and so on. We all share that common view on the ALC.

It is a topical issue in my community. In fact, it's dividing my friends. I've got a friend who would rather grow condos in his front yard and another very good friend at the Happy Valley Lavender Farm who is doing a thriving business growing lavender on the same land. So it's dividing the community. I'm hopeful that it won't come to the ALC, that cooler heads will prevail and that the OCP process can carry on with individuals applying as they see fit rather than having the district involve itself. But that's for them to decide.

[1615]

I just have two more questions on an unrelated subject: the integrated land management bureau. I understand there's an additional million dollars in the minister's budget for this entity. What is it, and what are they going to do with the money?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The integrated land management bureau is quite a large bureau. I'm not sure if the member's question is specific to a component, because there were some puts and takes in the ILMB. I think what the member may be asking — and I'm just questioning this — is with regards to Front Counter B.C., because there was a lift of a million dollars in Front Counter B.C. Is the question kind of generally with regards to the ILMB, or is it specific to one segment of the ILMB?

**J. Horgan:** It was in respect to communications and potential advertising. The moneys came to my atten-

tion in the context of pots of money being distributed to ministries, and in this instance, it was directed to ILMB.

**Hon. P. Bell:** That helps. That's much easier for me to answer.

The PAB central budget was distributed amongst the various ministries that have reasons why they need to be able to advertise publicly. Specifically, as it relates to the integrated land management bureau, much of the work will be done around the spirit bear and the north coast–central coast land use plan, as well as in anticipation of other land use plans that have been approved.

The member should know that the north coast–central coast land use plan has resonated around the world and has significant impacts on the way that particularly the European community, but literally the globe, is viewing British Columbia. The member may recall that through the 1990s, and the 1980s a little bit, the sorts of activities.... Different environmental groups campaigned active campaigns against British Columbia specifically in terms of its forestry practices and different sorts of practices. This certainly has created an opportunity for us to get back into those marketplaces and see British Columbia viewed again as an environmental leader. That money will largely be focused on marketing activities around the promotion of the north coast–central coast land use plan.

**J. Horgan:** Was this million dollars requested through Treasury Board, in a Treasury Board submission from your ministry, or was it just pennies from heaven?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Again, the PAB had the entire budget last year; it was centralized. In review with the deputy ministers from each ministry, they made determinations as to how that money would be allocated so that it would be spent, and each minister would be accountable for that budget, as opposed to having a global accountability.

We think it makes sense; it's appropriate. It certainly allows us to promote the good work that's been done on the north and central coasts. I'm sure the member would agree that that is something that has global significance. We want to make sure that we tell everyone about it.

**N. Simons:** Thank you for making yourself available to answer questions. My first question is a general one about the LRMP process for the Sunshine Coast forest district. I'm wondering if the minister would be able to give me an update on the status of that process.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm pleased to be able to tell the member that the scoping study for the LRMP has just very recently started. The lead in the ministry is Heather MacKnight. She'll be the one who would be the contact point to discuss it.

[1620]

The scoping study is intended to determine how broad in nature the plan needs to be, whether it should be an SRMP or an LRMP, and how much needs to be involved in the process. So that work will carry on through the summer months. I know the member has been very clear in his position on the need to develop a plan, and this is the first step of that process.

**N. Simons:** I appreciate that response, and I can tell you that the citizens of the Sunshine Coast, both the upper coast and the lower coast, were pleased to hear that the ministry found it in the budget to begin the scoping process. I hadn't heard about the SRMP. I'm still hoping that it's a comprehensive and high-level plan that will be able to serve the needs of the community, because as the minister knows, it's one after the other in terms of conflict over land use. I'm hoping that it addresses those concerns.

I'll pass things on to my colleague, as that was really the only question I had for the minister, and I appreciate him being here.

Oh, I should just make another comment....

Interjection.

**N. Simons:** This is just a dress rehearsal — right?

The issue around meat inspection regulations and slaughterhouse rules. I can also tell the minister that the communities I serve are pleased that some extra thought and extra resources, both in funding and planning, have gone into this important issue. I'm hoping, as well, that the possible changes or adjustments to the legislation will accommodate the needs of not just small communities but small, isolated communities that are separate geographically from other areas. So I'll just have that on the record for the minister.

**G. Coons:** Thank you very much for being here, gentlemen. Just a clarification to the minister: after my throne speech, he sort of indicated that I didn't mention the Great Bear rain forest. Locally and throughout my riding I did indicate that it was a role model for the rest of the province in land use planning that sets goals for the environment, economic development and community stability. I've been a long supporter of the Great Bear and where we're headed, but I have sort of a side note with that, with the community stability.

I thought in my own mind, and put it in writing also, that proper legislation and the necessary funding and resources were needed to ensure success for the first nations communities up and down the coast and the non-first nations communities that will, obviously, be affected. We look at what happened here — as far as recommendations that came from here, coming from first nations, the resource-based industries, the environmentalists, local governments and people who live in all these communities — and again, with close to 17 sectors at the table, I think the inputs from them were vital to this coming to fruition. I'm just wondering:

what was the status of the socially responsible investment fund?

[1625]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I should highlight that as a result of the north coast–central coast land use plan, we are in active negotiations with a number of different foundations as well as the federal government on matching funding for the CIII initiative, which I think the member is aware of.

When we've looked at the SRI initiative which the member is referring to.... At this point there are three other funds that mirror that fund, all with significant amounts of money in them. We want to see those funds expended out. We think that that's appropriate rather than creating a fourth fund.

The three funds that exist right now that are available for communities to tap into in the region of the north coast–central coast is the Coast Sustainability Trust. About \$22 million, as far as I know, is the last balance in that account that's available. There's the north Island–coast development initiative, which I know does not have a board yet but is in the process of being developed. Or I don't think it has a board yet. I shouldn't say it doesn't have a board yet. There's \$50 million available in that fund. Then, for portions of the north coast–central coast land use plan — where the member lives — of course, they have access to the Northern Development Initiative, which has \$185 million available to it.

So the CIII initiative is moving along. We don't have full agreement from the foundations or from the federal government as of yet. We're still working on that process — hope to come to a successful conclusion. The SRI fund, at this point, we didn't feel was necessary to move forward on, on the basis of three unexpended funds that would mirror the types of activities of the SRI fund.

**G. Coons:** Yes, I had a briefing a couple of weeks ago on this. One of the funds that you mention, the NDI.... I'm a member of the northwest RAC up there, as you are up in your region. The northwest RAC made a motion that they thought that the SRI should come through as the government committed. Most of the people that I talked to, who were sectors at the table, were under the impression that this funding was there to mitigate what was going to be happening — the economic impacts of reducing the harvestable land use.

Again, in the north we start to see these promises coming from governments to put their signature on a piece of paper and the government not coming through with their commitments. I know the Central Coast regional district has put it in writing as a motion that the government and the minister commit to the SRI funds. I know the Skeena–Queen Charlotte regional district has also requested that. I've got a note from one of the mayors which says: "The SRI funds were promised to all communities in order to offset the negative economic impact of reducing harvestable land use." My council is clear: no SRI funds. Our support for the LRMP is withdrawn.

I think, again, the government can't just sort of say that there's other sources of funding out there that people can access when the other sources of funding were created for other reasons, and people are looking towards that and looking at drawing and leveraging off of the funds. So as far as the SRI, could I just get a brief description of...? Obviously, you've heard my concern and the concern in the region, and I hope that the minister looks at fulfilling the commitment. But I was just wondering what the government's commitments were and the commitments of the SRI and the total fund for that.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I should be clear to the member that this land use plan is actually anticipated to generate more economic activity, not less economic activity. The initial review that we have done with regard to the timber harvesting land base is that the annual allowable cut should actually increase somewhat over what the cut has been, traditionally, in the region.

[1630]

Over the last number of years there's been an average of about two and a half million cubic metres per year harvested in the central and north coast areas. We're anticipating that to go up into about the three-million-cubic-metre range. So the notion that the decisions that were made are going to be detrimental.... I think that assertion is perhaps inaccurate.

I think the other thing that is important for the member to note is.... I believe that the member was there when the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast was asking for us to develop a land use plan for the Sunshine Coast. The north coast–central coast land use plan actually came about much in the same way. It was the communities up and down the coast that came forward and said: "We believe that a land use plan for our region will stimulate economic activity and long-term certainty for our region and can build a base of economic certainty for our region."

The communities actually came forward and asked government to engage in the process of the development of a land use plan, with a belief that it would encourage economic activity, which I believe is the case. I think the land use plan will generate economic activity over time, so the assertion that there should be a fund in place in order to mitigate losses I'm not sure would make sense on that basis.

I want to review again for the member that there are currently three funds in place in that region. One that certainly comes to mind is the Coast Sustainability Trust, which was put in place a number of years ago and has been historically underdrawn. It was put in place in April of 2002 with a fund of \$35 million. Although I don't have the exact number for the member, to the best of my knowledge there's about \$22 million unexpended in that particular fund. So there is a significant amount of money, and that pretty well mirrors the area we're referring to here.

Now, the other two funds. The north Island–coast development initiative does not exactly mirror the central coast–north coast planning area but does incorpo-

rate much of it. We'll have \$50 million in that fund shortly. The money is already allocated, I think, but the board needs to get up and running and put in place. I'm sure the member is going to be eager to assist with the development of that. Then, of course, the Northern Development Initiative has \$185 million in it as well.

At this point we're eager to move forward and see the communities tap into the existing trust funds that are available and see how things shake out as a result of the land use plan. We think that there is going to be increased economic activity on the land base, not decreased economic activity. Certainly, we're looking forward to that occurring.

**G. Coons:** I guess I sort of wanted a breakdown of the numbers of who was supposed to contribute what to the SRI.

Again, I just wanted to go back to the belief the government has that it's going to create increased economic development and initiatives. When these communities — these stakeholders, these sectors, these communities up and down the line, and the first nations communities — signed on to this, they also had a belief. They had a belief that there was a fund.

They didn't see themselves going over and trying to beg and borrow from another fund. That fund was there in their minds, and they signed on for a specific reason. Again, that's just sort of my statement on that. I'm getting more and more comments to that, and I'm sure the minister is getting more and more motions and letters in reference to the SRI fund and that it's a necessity to both the north coast and central coast and the Haida LMRPs. That was mentioned in the SRI also.

Concluding, before I pass it on, back to my colleague, I was just sort of wondering the breakdown of who was supposed to commit what to the SRI, and the amounts, please.

[1635]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I appreciate the member's question. There has never been a commitment on the part of the provincial government towards the SRI fund. There certainly was some discussion from the federal government, as I understand it, and the ENGOs with regards to the SRI fund.

I want to move back and talk just for a moment about the other funds: Coast Sustainability Trust, \$35 million; the north Island-coast development initiative, \$50 million; the northern development initiative, \$185 million. That adds up to \$270 million, and I just want to tell you, Mr. Chair, that that works out to \$270 million more than the NDP ever delivered to that region.

**G. Coons:** Just on that, if we look at what the rural communities in the north and elsewhere in the province have contributed to the economic base of this province over the years, I'm sure the minister would, perhaps, rethink that statement and then realize that over 75 percent of the economic base is coming from rural areas like we're talking about.

I think that ensuring that the fund that was promised to the north coast, central coast and Haida LMRPs would be there for the communities that need it at this particular time, especially after what happened last week.... We're in a real dilemma up and down the coast, as far as tourism and where we're going with LMRPs. So on that, I'd like to pass it on. Thank you very much, minister.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I just want to point out to the member that that member's government was in place for ten years. They didn't deliver a single dollar. The resources came out of my region of the province, Prince George and, certainly to a lesser extent, out of his region. You know what? The \$270 million is delivered into funds that are controlled by local communities that the member quite accurately points out sit on the board of one of the committees that control this fund that is at arms length from the provincial government and does a great job in terms of delivering resources out to the communities. Let's see how that \$270 million delivers for those communities, and then if we have to deal with it, we will.

**C. Evans:** I want to talk briefly, firstly, about the meat issue. I will express my appreciation to the minister for the attempts today to make changes to the meat processing regulations and timing that the minister had announced last year.

In estimates last fall I asked the minister if he could commit that Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture staff would visit my constituency. I think there were two meetings in my constituency. Just Saturday at meetings in Cranbrook the mayor of Slocan and others from the Slocan area asked if a meeting could be held on a farm near Slocan and chaired by the mayor of Slocan City with Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health staff in attendance to precisely discuss meat regulations, and I said I would make that request.

So to the minister: can the minister agree to such a meeting in Slocan City on a farm, and will the minister's staff contact me to arrange a time and a place?

[1640]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I can certainly commit to a Ministry of Agriculture and Lands staff person being there. Typically, there is a Ministry of Health employee that would join him. But not having responsibility directly for the Ministry of Health, it's impossible for me to commit to that individual or an individual from the Ministry of Health being there.

**C. Evans:** Thank you to the minister for that commitment. I'm going to assume that somebody from the Ministry of Agriculture will contact me, and we can arrange a time and place. I will contact the mayor of Slocan.

Now I want to canvass a little bit, just to get it on the record prior to that meeting, what the folks in Slocan are after. As I have discussed with the minister, both on the record and off the record, my concern, or



the concern of my constituents, is that if I raise a cow and you, hon. Chair, kill it and butcher it and sell it to the minister, one of the three of us will be in contravention of the law.

My question to the minister is: am I correct in understanding that the transaction I just described will still be against the law when the new regulations are in effect?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Not if the hon. Chair is a provincially inspected facility.

**C. Evans:** And if the hon. Chair were to not be a provincially inspected facility, the transaction I just described would be against the law. Is that correct?

**Hon. P. Bell:** That's correct.

**C. Evans:** I would like to put on the record, as the minister knows, my opinion that such a system as we just described will create outlaws. Although the hon. Chair is not likely to engage in these practices, many of my constituents will. They will do so with some rancour, and they will do so in hiding.

I need to say on the record that I think that when we pass legislation or a regulatory regime that encourages honest citizens to go around the law, we make a mistake in public policy, because we lose the chance to engage those people in dialogue and inspection and conversation if we create outlaws instead, and we lessen the respect for legislation and governance in general. I want to put on the record my wish, because I do not wish to....

I agree with the minister's need to create a regulatory regime that is perceived as excellent by consumers, the Ministry of Health officials, the government of Canada and our customers around the world. But a better regulatory regime would be one that said, "You could kill my cow and sell it to the minister. What couldn't happen is a commercial transaction from the minister to another person or a store," so that people, between themselves, could continue to make local arrangements with local beef and local consumers below the level that would allow the economies of scale to build a provincially inspected abattoir.

If we could simply cut out third-party commercial sales but still make deals between neighbours, it would benefit the farm community and would stop the minister or the Ministry of Health or anybody else from hiring the myriad investigators it will take in future to find criminal behaviour amongst honest people simply trying to eat local meat in local communities.

[1645]

My question to the minister is simply this. I appreciate his having put off bringing in the regulatory regime. Can the farm community and MLAs and local people carry on a dialogue attempting to find common sense, or is this conversation finished?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The member quite rightly points out one of four different components of the announcement

that we made yesterday, and that is the extension of the period of time to come into compliance with the regulations. But there are three other components to the announcement that we made.

The first is a \$5 million fund that will be managed by Investment Agriculture that will allow private abattoirs to apply for up to \$50,000 to enhance coming into compliance with provincial regulations. If it is a regional abattoir, they can apply for up to \$100,000 to come into compliance with provincial regulations.

The second key piece — and something that we heard consistently — was that processors were concerned about the cost of inspection in their facilities. The Ministry of Health has agreed to cover the costs of all inspections out to 2012, which is the end of the fiscal budgeting period.

Beyond that, we would relook at that for five years.

The third key part is in recognition of the fact that there are a number of abattoirs around the province that have invested heavily to come into compliance with the regulations already, with the belief that there would be an increased flow of product into their facilities as of September of 2006. We allowed all of those facilities to apply retroactively into the \$5 million fund that I commented on earlier.

I intend to spend a significant amount of time in the next few months talking to the ranching and processing community about making sure that we meet the needs of a healthy industry. I don't think we want to presuppose what that industry looks like as we move through the next number of months, but I think it is important to note that there's a significant amount of money available for processors to come into compliance. Our hope is that you would see a large number of these facilities develop around the province in an economic way so that the minister can purchase from the Chair a side of cut, wrapped and freshly frozen beef that he purchased from the MLA.

**C. Evans:** I just want to belabour the point. For example, when we have the meeting in Slokan — that the minister has kindly agreed to — should they have sensible suggestions about how the regulations might be brought in or interpreted in order not to create outlaws out of honest people, can those suggestions be considered by the minister or does today's or this week's announcement by the minister constitute an end of this conversation?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I always look forward to receiving useful comments.

**C. Evans:** Good answer. That's great and will set a good tone for the meeting in Slokan City and perhaps others around the province.

I want to move on now to constructive questions about the idea of creating an agriculture committee made up of one party. To lay the groundwork, it is my impression that there is going to be or has been set up by the minister or the Premier or some function of government a committee to create an agriculture plan that

involves only members of one political party. My first question is: is that a correct assumption?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I have created a committee under the leadership of the Parliamentary Secretary for Agricultural Planning, who was appointed by the Premier to establish an agricultural plan for B.C. We did canvass this earlier on Thursday, but I'll walk the member through it again.

I suggested to the opposition critic — and, certainly, I know the member has an interest in agriculture as well — that they provide us with recommendations and suggestions as to how they see creating a bright future for agriculture. In fact, if the member hasn't received an official request in writing, we will be providing them with that.

[1650]

The committee will prepare a body of work that will have a series of different approaches that could be taken to develop an agricultural plan. The parliamentary secretary will then take that body of work and actually prepare the physical plan. That is her job as the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture Planning.

It will be a two-step process. Certainly, we believe that there is an opportunity for the opposition to contribute to this, and we're eagerly awaiting their submissions as well.

**C. Evans:** I want to put on the record — through you, hon. Chair, to the folks behind the glass, to the people of British Columbia — that I find this a terribly offensive idea. It's not anything that I understand. It's not in my understanding of the tradition of this place, and it feels to me an aberration that may have come out of years when there was no official opposition.

I once chaired the Select Standing Committee on Forests — the Liberal, Mr. Wilf Hurd was the co-Chair. The group, which included members of what is now the government caucus, worked for, I think, a year and a half and came forward with consensus recommendations to the Legislature. Mr. Hurd spoke, I spoke, and the Legislature adopted a plan. The gentleman to your left, the Clerk of Committees, led that process, travelled with those people and brought together the political partisanship that members bring into common sense and a group understanding of how to drive an industry.

What the minister just described is, I think, an offence to that tradition. I feel personally, as kids would say, dissed by such an idea. The people I represent — lots of them — who grow apples, raise cattle, grow cherries and run dairy farms might have been represented in an all-party committee. I don't feel that they're presently represented. I am terrified that the day will come when the committee, made up of wonderful people from the minister's side of government, will bring forward a report that I will feel compelled to criticize for the process of its creation, because my constituents and my colleagues in the opposition were left out of that process.

Hon. Chair, I would like to say that I will not be making presentations. It may be a show of pride on my

part, but I will not go, cap in hand, to a committee, which I think is of this very work that I do, as an outsider and say: "Gee, I have thoughts too." I will wait until I am invited by the minister to participate in such a process and then participate with all the goodwill, energy, intellectual skill and acumen I can bring to it. But I am not an outsider in my own work, and I would ask the minister to reconsider what I think is the worst public policy decision of his term thus far in the venerable chair as Minister of Agriculture.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm sorry the member feels that way. There is certainly an opportunity for him to contribute in a significant way. If he chooses not to contribute, then I suppose that's his decision.

**B. Ralston:** I note that the official dealing with the Agricultural Land Commission is not here. I do have a couple of questions on the CAIS — the Canadian agricultural income stabilization — program. So if I can direct those....

[1655]

These issues were canvassed in the fall, particularly in relation to fruit growers. Given that there were only 20 percent of the growers who applied to the program, the minister was quoted as saying: "Either they don't understand the program, or they don't require a support program." Nevertheless, the member for Kelowna-Lake Country, on October 5 in the House, issued a plea for the minister and the government to consider, I think, the failures of the CAIS program, and he said:

Okanagan growers are finding it difficult to tap into the program, which is based out of Winnipeg. There are also cultural and language barriers for Indo-Canadian growers trying to access CAIS. Some growers are simply throwing up their hands in frustration with the application process, as evidenced by the fact that only 20 percent of growers have applied to CAIS for assistance with last year's low crop returns.

In addition, I think it has become notorious that the CAIS program is not working, and indeed, in the last election the now present Minister of Agriculture federally, as part of the program of his party, promised to abolish CAIS. I think the campaign word was "Replace CAIS."

Now, at the recent ministerial conference of Ministers of Agriculture — the provincial Ministers of Agriculture meeting with the federal minister — the minister appeared to retreat from that campaign commitment and said he was going to transform CAIS. So I'm wondering, given the dissatisfaction with the program — indeed, on the government side — the widespread public discussion and the notorious nature of the program, such that the now governing party in Ottawa felt it was appropriate to replace the program, what view the minister took to the conference on behalf of British Columbia producers and growers.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'd like to update the member on the applications to the CAIS program by the tree fruit

growers. As of March 19, 2006, out of a potential of 1,021 growers, there were 881 completed applications — my math says that's around 87 percent — with 594 processed so far, and the remainder being processed.

The member commented on the recent federal-provincial Agriculture Ministers meeting that was held a couple of weeks ago, where the federal minister commented that CAIS needed to be transformed. I should highlight for the member that it was unanimously determined by all of the provincial Agriculture Ministers that it made more sense to fix CAIS than it did to replace CAIS.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

There are two years remaining in this rendition of CAIS, and by the time a new program was fully developed and brought forward, the sense of the room was that it would make more sense to fix CAIS and ensure that it met the needs of producers. To that end, there were a number of decisions announced just a few days ago. I think Friday, perhaps, the news release came out from the federal government on some very specific changes to the CAIS program.

[1700]

I really think it's important for the member to know that our view, or my personal view, of the CAIS program is that the fundamentals behind the CAIS program in terms of delivering stability of income are very good. In fact, if you were to define a program, I suspect you would define the same types of fundamentals that you would use in describing CAIS.

The problem with the CAIS program is not in the fundamentals and how it's been established; it's been in the delivery process of CAIS, which is a federal responsibility. It has not functioned effectively. It has been very slow to react and very complex. That message was taken to the federal minister in no uncertain terms, and the federal minister has agreed to put whatever is necessary behind the resourcing of CAIS to ensure that it is delivered in an effective way and that our producers can count on it for income stabilization.

**B. Ralston:** The Canadian Federation of Independent Business did a detailed survey of CAIS across the country. Their conclusion of the survey results is: "a troubling picture of a program that is time-consuming, difficult to understand, costly to participate in, and offers inadequate payments." First of all, does the minister agree with that description of the program?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I thank the member for bringing up the CFIB review. Actually, I took the opportunity of taking a copy of the CFIB review to the federal-provincial ministers meeting, and quoted from it in several places to my colleagues from across Canada and to the federal minister.

To be clear, my thoughts of the CAIS program are that the definition, the framework, the establishment of the CAIS program are such that it should provide income stability to our farming community if it is effec-

tively implemented. The volume of paperwork that's required in the implementation, the degree of difficulty behind the implementation, the timeliness, the inability of our producers to access people with CAIS knowledge locally here in British Columbia are all problematic, and those are the things that I believe specifically need to be fixed as they relate to CAIS.

**B. Ralston:** What specific commitments did this minister extract or get from the federal minister to solve the concerns of B.C. producers and growers specifically? I've outlined some of them already: not responsive, perhaps, to some of the cultural and linguistic characteristics of our province. I am told that the administrative problems are such that people don't know the status of their application for months and months. There have been problems with lack of payments and then, on the other side, overpayments, which cause tax problems for growers. I'm told that banks and other financial institutions don't have confidence in the program, so it can't be used to obtain credit.

I appreciate that the minister has raised some of these concerns at the conference. I'm wondering what specific commitments were obtained from the federal minister. Given the apparent view that his party took of the program going into the election — that there are some serious problems — what specific commitments for British Columbia growers and producers did he get?

[1705]

**Hon. P. Bell:** We're just trying to track down a press release that came from the federal government, confirming some of the commitments that they'd made. We should have that in a few minutes.

We're working just off the top of our heads at this point, but there were a number of different things that were committed to. One was the elimination of the deposit mechanism, shifting to a fee-based mechanism, and the waiving of all fees for the 2003, 2004 and 2005 crop years, so the fees will only come into play for the 2006 and 2007 crop years. There's also a commitment to a new on-line status system to be available by fall so that applicants can review the status of their application and know where it is.

But the most important thing, I think, that the member should be aware of is that this was a brand-new federal minister. As the member knows, a federal election just took place. We were very specific in our comments around needing to improve the processing of the applications. It is a federal responsibility. It is something that they have chosen to implement with their own methodology. We are very concerned that we don't have access to people in a timely fashion.

This ministry, in fact, spends a significant amount of money helping producers. We have a number of staff located specifically in the Okanagan that are out helping producers fill out their forms on a regular basis. We're not happy about that. We could refocus those resources on other areas. This is a federal area of re-

sponsibility, but we're confident that the new federal minister has heard our concerns. In the very short time that the federal minister has had to review our comments, we believe he'll be coming back with positive solutions.

**B. Ralston:** The minister has referred to the decision to replace the deposit requirement of CAIS with an entrance fee. Is the minister aware...? Perhaps I can relay this through this process: the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture wrote an open letter condemning this particular change and said:

It's frankly unbelievable. The minister has had a chance to remove an additional financial burden on farmers and acknowledge that farmers already cover 30 percent of the cost of the CAIS program. Again, they also fail to make a real, bankable commitment to help farmers facing desperate times. Once again, they put other interests ahead of the interests of the people they're supposed to represent — farmers."

That's a March 21, 2006, press release from the B.C. Agriculture Council released on their website.

So can the minister comment on that, given that he appears to have supported this step of replacing a deposit requirement with an entrance fee?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The fee, for the member's information, is \$4.50 per \$1,000 of coverage. So if a producer chose to take on \$100,000 in coverage, the fee that would be associated with that coverage would be \$450. One of the guiding principles of the CAIS program is that there should be producer participation in the program, that producers should have to commit to the program if they want to take part in it and that it shouldn't just be seen as free money. They need to be engaged in and involved in it.

[1710]

The belief amongst the provincial ministers was that \$4.50 per \$1,000 of coverage was an appropriate amount of money to ask producers — again, \$450 would provide \$100,000 in coverage. We thought that was affordable and reasonable.

I've just been handed a copy of the news release. One of the areas that was agreed on was a review of CAIS to separate income stabilization from disaster relief and to look at the federal government taking on a more significant role as it relates to disaster relief — although that was simply a step that officials would report back to us at our June meeting in terms of that information. There are a number of other things I'd be happy to talk about if the member chooses to go there.

**B. Ralston:** The minister has made reference to the fact that provincial ministry officials and staff appear to be spending some time assisting producers in completing some of the paperwork necessary for CAIS. That's a complaint about the CAIS program — that they have very few, if any, staff on the ground to help people with individual applications. Again, what commitment did the minister get or did the federal minister make as a result of pressure brought by this

minister to put more CAIS staff on the ground, particularly in the Okanagan?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Let's look at the history of this. The federal minister has been a minister for about six or seven weeks at this point. We have made it very clear that we are concerned with regards to the delivery of the CAIS program in British Columbia. We expect to see the federal minister address that issue. We are confident he's heard our message, and we believe that he will address it in a way that works for all of our producers, including the possibility of looking at people on the ground in British Columbia from the federal government.

**B. Ralston:** I'm proposing, if I might — and I don't know what staff supplement will be required — to ask a series of questions about the Agricultural Land Commission at this stage. One of the clear statements that the minister made in the estimates process in the fall about the operation of the Agricultural Land Commission was that the provincial government establishes the policy regime that is necessary. I'm quoting from page 1143 of the estimates, Monday, October 24: "We provide the financial resources based on the request from the Agricultural Land Commission when they bring their service plan forward and when it is reviewed, and then, certainly, we ensure they are accountable for their actions."

Following with that theme of accountability and setting the policy framework, I want to pose a question about the Barnston Island application. The Barnston Island application was initiated more than two years ago. The public meeting concerning the application was held just slightly less than two years ago. Yet there's been no decision reached on the application. I'm advised by someone who contacted the commission office in the last few days that the proponents have requested that this decision be adjourned yet again, if it is going to be made, until after May 1, 2006.

I know that the minister will not want to comment on a specific application, but this speaks to the policy framework that this is operating in. An application that's sitting before the commission with no decision in sight being allowed to simply sit there and encourage speculation about the future and instability in the land market cannot be considered to be a good policy framework, at the very least.

[1715]

Is the minister satisfied with what appears to be the particular policy of the commission, which is that they're prepared to let an application be made and just sit there rather than say: "Beyond a certain point, it's over. There's a statute of limitations or an administrative time line, and if there's no decision or if you request it to be adjourned, the application is dead, and you have to submit a new application"? It seems to be very, very bad public policy. I'd invite the minister to give us his views on that.

**Hon. P. Bell:** Again, I always hesitate to comment on any specific application, but since the member

brings it up and is looking for a general policy statement, I think it would be appropriate to utilize the Barnston example. In the Barnston case, as I understand it, the proponents have requested that their application be put on hold. I was unaware that there was any extension to that request until the member just pointed that out, but perhaps that's the case. I don't know that to be the case, but I'm joined now by Colin Fry again, so I'm sure he'll be able to tell me if that is the case or not.

Conversely, I suppose, if the proponents wanted to, they would have the ability to withdraw the application and then resubmit, if they so chose, at a future time. I'm not sure that that would be any different, but if the member is suggesting that an appropriate policy decision or provision would be that applicants can only be in the process for a specific length of time, I would be pleased to take that as advice and review it.

**B. Ralston:** Well, the Attorney General certainly has expressed his concern — since this is a quasi-judicial body — about the length of time it takes matters to come to trial in the court system. This would appear to be an inordinate delay. I am told that the reason why this is being delayed is ostensibly to consult with the Greater Vancouver regional district, yet I'm also advised that no consultation has taken place at all. So this would perhaps, if that's accurate, appear to be simply a pretext for just putting this matter off.

I'm wondering: given the minister's response, what commitment is he making? Is he making a commitment to review the rules of procedure of the commission and make some recommendations or seek advice from the Attorney General's ministry about how this quasi-judicial forum is operating? I know that the previous Attorney General did conduct an extensive review of rules and procedure of quasi-judicial tribunals under the authority of the provincial government, so perhaps the minister can be a little bit more specific about what commitment, if any, he's making here.

[1720]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I have a little bit more information on the file that I can share with the member. As I understand it, last week there was a further request to extend the process to May 31 from April 30 — for an additional month. The panel has not yet reviewed that request to make a decision. It will be up to the panel whether or not it is appropriate to extend the time frame from April 30 to May 31. This process is one under which it's a normally occurring event that if an extension is requested on behalf of the proponent, the panel reviews that request and then makes a decision on whether or not to accept that request in part or in full.

The member may want to ask a further question. It would be: is there an example of anyplace where the panel has not agreed to extend the length of an extension or has not agreed to provide an extension? I'm informed that the original extension requested on

Barnston was longer than April 30 and that the panel only agreed to the extension to April 30.

I will repeat what I said earlier as well. That was that if the member thinks there should be a statutory limitation on the total length of time under which a piece of property could be reviewed for exclusion, I would be happy to accept that as advice and would be happy to review that. It has not been something that's been brought to my attention prior to this time as something that creates complexities for people choosing to put land in or to review land in the agricultural land reserve.

**B. Ralston:** I understand that the appointment of the vice-chair, Mr. Dhillon, who's considering this application, has already expired or expires at the end of the month, at the end of April. Can the minister confirm that that's the status of that particular appointment?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I am advised that Mr. Dhillon's term expires May 1, 2006.

**B. Ralston:** Last time the minister said he didn't know anything about Mr. Dhillon but that when a member came forward for reappointment, he would be reviewing the resumé. Given that it would appear that his term is virtually up, I want to ask the minister: is he being considered for reappointment or not?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Mr. Dhillon would be considered if he expressed an interest for renewal of his appointment.

**B. Ralston:** I appreciate that the minister, I don't believe, makes the appointment himself. It's referred through the Premier's office. If the minister or the Premier were to decline this appointment, what would be the status of the application, given that this particular person has sat on this application since its inception, I understand? If he were to leave, it would seem that the application would not be able to proceed further.

[1725]

**Hon. P. Bell:** In fact, if Mr. Dhillon's appointment were to expire and he were either to not resubmit for appointment, or if there was a decision made to replace Mr. Dhillon with another individual — again, this is becoming somewhat speculative in that neither of those events has taken place as of yet — the new decision-maker would be duty bound to make the decision the same way that Mr. Dhillon would have been required to make that decision. The same information would have to be considered and applied to the statutory decision.

This kind of comes back to what we talked about in the fall estimate period and what the member, quite accurately, has identified in the *Hansard* document, which is: it is government's role to establish the policy framework under which the Agricultural Land Commission operates. The Agricultural Land Commission really acts in a quasi-judicial fashion and makes deci-

sions on the basis of that policy framework that's in place.

On the off chance that the member may ask this question next, I'll respond that in addition to Mr. Dhilon's appointment, the other two panel members' also expire at the same time.

**B. Ralston:** Just so I'm clear, then, the appointments of all three members of this panel expire April 30, 2006, and the application itself has been adjourned to May 2006 for decision. Is that correct?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Actually, the expiry date is May 1, 2006, and that is correct.

**B. Ralston:** This returns, then, to the issue of policy and how these appointments are made. Knowing that the expiration of one's appointment is imminent, to adjourn such an important application beyond the date of the expiry of one's appointment might create some perception or pressure that in order to make the decision or to finish the job, those particular members of the panel would have to be reappointed. Does the minister have any comments on that public perception?

**Hon. P. Bell:** No.

**B. Ralston:** Is the minister, then, saying that this method, this sequence, this chronology of appointment — all appointments expire, the application is adjourned past that date, and then the appointments and reappointments are considered — is mandated in the policy, the direction that's given to the Agricultural Land Commission? If it is mandated, is it a good policy?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The policy expiry dates vary, depending on the jurisdiction or depending on the particular region that the members represent. There happen to be a significant number of appointments coming due this coming May, and that may be of concern to the member, but certainly, as cabinet.... The process is that each member is vetted through the BRDO process that comes forward. I make a recommendation to cabinet. Cabinet makes the decision on who the appointments are to the Agricultural Land Commission.

Certainly, when those decisions are being made, in terms of who sits on each of the panels, one of the factors that would be considered would be continuity of the panels, along with other issues in terms of reviewing each of the individual's credentials and the quality of decisions that we believe they'll be able to make and if they will be able to work with the policy direction that government has established.

It is never the best situation to have all members of any board, commission or panel expire at the same time, and we deal with those circumstances as we're confronted with them.

**B. Ralston:** Given what the minister has just said about continuity, it might seem to a member of the public looking at the operation of this particular panel

that the minister will be obliged to appoint at least one, if not all, of the three members of the panel in order to ensure some continuity. Otherwise, this major application — surely the biggest application sitting before the commission in that region, a subject of considerable public controversy — will be faced with having an entirely new panel consider it.

[1730]

One might think that there might be some legal problems that would confront the panel, if that were to be the case, that might very well wind up in court, given the fact that there was a public process and then none of the people who are going to make the decision are around to make the decision.

I guess my concern is that: the continuity element. What weight is given to that, and can the minister point me to the written policy of the commission or the ministry that would assist in making that decision?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Certainly, as we are going through the appointment process for any of the panels, we factor into the equation the importance of continuity. But let us suppose that there would be a large turnover in an individual panel, because I think that's the theme of the member's question. How would the situation then be handled in the Agricultural Land Commission, if there were two-thirds of a panel changed or, let's say for the sake of argument, if even an entire panel were changed?

There are thorough records kept of all the activities of the panel by the very diligent employees in the Agricultural Land Commission. They would present the information back to the panel for their review. They would then be required to ensure that they were confident they had the body of information that was required. If they did not feel confident that they had the body of information necessary in order to make a decision within the policy framework that had been outlined for them, then they would go back and perhaps re-interview, re-meet — do whatever was necessary — in order to ensure that they felt that they had adequately received the information necessary to make a panel decision.

This continuity is important. I think the member points that out. I agree with the member that it is important for continuity on the panels. There will be times where you don't have the level of continuity that's necessary, for a number of reasons.

[1735]

It is quite conceivable that you would have a turnover of more than one person — or two or even all three people — on the panel. In order to ensure that decisions are made in a judicious manner, the new panel members have the ability and the statutory duty to go back and review the information.

I think what the member points out is accurate. We would always prefer to have continuity on the panel. Sometimes members will choose to continue to sit on a panel; sometimes they will not. It is appropriate from time to time to make changes on a panel. I think that it's appropriate to keep some fresh blood in the system. We'll cross those bridges if and when we get to them.

**B. Ralston:** Perhaps then, Mr. Chair, we could recess at this point and resume in an hour or so.

**The Chair:** Committee A estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands will now stand recessed until 6:45 p.m.

The committee recessed from 5:36 p.m. to 6:46 p.m.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

On Vote 12 (*continued*).

**C. Wyse:** Let me just make sure I've got all my facts here in front of me.

Minister, on September 14, 2000.... I read the actual release from an incident that took place:

The rock formation that gave the community of Lone Butte its name has been protected from development as a result of a land exchange agreement...announced today on behalf of Environment, Lands and Parks....

The butte is all that remains of the plug of an ancient volcano that once erupted in the Cariboo. At more than 75 metres tall, the rock formation stands out amongst the surrounding lowlands. Now that it is owned by the province, this butte has been set aside as a recreation reserve....

In total, the province acquired 9.4 hectares of land at Lone Butte as a result of this agreement. In exchange for the butte, the province has provided Vesco Contracting Ltd., a forest company, with Crown lands in the remote area northeast of Prince George. The province also obtained property near Port Hardy and Duncan through the exchange.

The difficulty that is pursued is that unfortunately, Lone Butte sits on lot 7, not lot 8, as was first believed. As a consequence, the actual retainment of this particular piece of property has sat in the bureaucracy since that period of time.

[L. Mayencourt in the chair.]

The community of Lone Butte, which initiated the request to the government to obtain this piece of property, has been petitioning my office to pursue with you your personal intervention to help move along the problems that exist around this particular issue, which sits with your bureaucracy now.

That is my request of the minister. I'm looking for his assistance here.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I just missed the date that this news release was from, if I could ask the member to identify that for me.

**C. Wyse:** September 14, 2000.

[1850]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I was not aware of the file until the member just brought it up, although I have staff here who have a rough knowledge of it. What I can tell the member is that I've driven by Lone Butte a number of

times. I think it is more than worth saving, and we should do whatever's necessary to do that. We'll take that as direction to staff. We'll make that happen.

What we will commit to is updating the member within two weeks of the status of the file. That should give us enough opportunity to get into it in enough depth to understand the complexities of it.

**C. Wyse:** My appreciation from Cariboo South and Lone Butte for that commitment. I'm very appreciative.

My second question is with regard to the study funds for the beef cluster for the Cattlemen's Association. Very recently the studies in that area have come back not looking optimistic as to the disposal of waste products for incineration. Therefore, in talking with representatives of the Cattlemen's Association, the status of the funding for the cluster-two stage becomes more important.

My question is: where does the funding for this particular project sit at this time?

[1855]

**Hon. P. Bell:** A couple of questions, I think. I'll try to answer them in order, if I may.

The first question was as it pertains to the strategy that is being built in the Williams Lake area around a beef cluster and some initial work that was done — and I might add, very good work, I thought — in terms of what was necessary to build that cluster.

The announcement that we made in Prince George yesterday in terms of moving out the date for the regulations as they relate to inspected facilities to September 30, 2007, also included an announcement of \$5 million that was to support infrastructure and, actually, the extension of the type of thing the member's talking about. The community of Williams Lake could apply for a grant of up to \$100,000 out of the fund that was established yesterday to continue the work that has been established already at developing a beef cluster.

Just announced yesterday, it's being done through.... The B.C. Food Processors Association is managing that process, but those grants will be available in short order. Within the next few weeks the processors should be set up and ready to go.

That's the part as it pertains to how the member takes forward the issue of building a beef cluster in the Williams Lake region and what funding is available. There's \$100,000 funding available. There may be some other funding. We're still working through some details on that.

The second piece, as it pertains to specified-risk-material disposal. There still remains \$5 million in the Investment Agriculture Foundation for specified-risk-material disposal. The hangup has been on the federal government's position in terms of what constitutes adequate disposal.

In speaking with the federal minister a few weeks ago, he indicated that they were getting close to a final decision. It looks like it's one that will work for us. There is \$5 million available to help groups such as Williams Lake develop adequate disposal techniques

that will provide for the necessary elimination of risk materials.

**C. Wyse:** I thank the minister on behalf of the constituents of Cariboo South for his answers.

**B. Simpson:** I can echo my fellow MLA there. There are a few people in my neck of the woods breathing a sigh of relief, as well, as a result of yesterday's announcement. So I appreciate that, and I appreciate the minister's staff's assistance, because we are still going to proceed with a forum to give people the opportunity to have some questions answered and to understand. That will be taking place April 18 in Williams Lake. We've had very good support from the minister's staff to do that.

What I would like to do is spend a few minutes around LRMPs, so I don't know if you need to do a staff change. One of the things that I'm curious about is the role that the Agriculture and Lands ministry will play in the approval process for forest stewardship plans. What is that role, and how does the minister see that role playing out over the course of the year?

[1900]

**Hon. P. Bell:** Actually, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands has nothing to do with the process. The integrated land management bureau, which also reports through to me, does have a responsibility for the establishment of objectives that must be met in forest stewardship plans.

The integrated land management bureau does not actually have a role in the approval of the plans. They don't review the plans. They don't ensure compliance in the plans. But the statutory decision-makers in the Ministry of Forests have to consider the land use objectives that have been established via the integrated land management bureau.

**B. Simpson:** Then, does the ILMB do this on a regional basis so that they look at the LRMPs or the higher-level plans in their forest district or their region? Do they do a specific document that then goes to the district manager for forests as to what to look for, or do they give it to industry? Who does that...? Do they (a) do a document, and (b) if they do a document, who does it go to so that it finds its way into these forest stewardship plans?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Under section 93.4 of the land amendment act, I delegate the authority to different regional directors around the province to establish specific objectives for each of the land use plans. One example of an objective would be the old-growth orders that were implemented a number of years ago.

Those documents are then sent from the delegated decision-maker over to the Ministry of Forests office and are housed in that Ministry of Forests office. An example of that would be the Cariboo-Chilcotin higher-use plan that was legalized, and that would be

forwarded over and on file at the Ministry of Forests office and be considered in any of the plans at that time.

**B. Simpson:** If I understand the minister correctly, then, there is a framework that exists. That framework is on file, if you will, for the district forest personnel to be able to then look at forest stewardship plans with that filter in mind.

[1905]

Will ILMB or any other function of Agriculture and Lands actually look at the practices on the ground to see if those higher-level objectives are being taken into account in the actual practices? I know we're just passing all the FSPs this year, but is there an intent in future years that there will be some kind of examination from Agriculture and Lands or the ILMB to see how that played out with actual practices on the ground?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Four different points I guess I'd like to make here. First of all, the member's description of the process, as he articulated it, is accurate and does reflect how the process works. The enforcement on the land base actually falls to all statutory decision-makers within government. The primary two, currently, in terms of enforcement would be Ministry of Forests and Ministry of Environment, who are obligated to include the work done and registered under the LRMPs in their evaluation of the activity on the land base. So ILMB does not have enforcement staff per se, but other statutory decision-makers in government are obligated to enforce that work.

Have you already done Forests? No, you're done — aren't you? No, you haven't.

**B. Simpson:** I've still got it to do.

**Hon. P. Bell:** Okay, so there is a new program called FREP, which is forest resource evaluation program, that the Minister of Forests is putting in place that will address some of these issues. I'd encourage the member to pursue that with the Forests Minister when those estimates are up.

The final thing I wanted to just touch on is that this is, I believe, an issue — the way that we implement land use plans around the province. The land use planning is extremely important, but I think implementation of those land use plans is at least as important as an effective planning process.

I don't believe that's something that's been done successfully. I'm not suggesting any particular government is or is not responsible for that, just simply that there hasn't been an effective implementation process. That's been a flag for me for a period of time now.

To that end, I've met with the Muskwa-Kechika management board and asked them to take on as a challenge an evaluation and an establishment of an effective implementation model for land use plans. The MK board has a responsibility for three different planning areas — very diverse region. Probably one of the



more effective LRMPs in the province is in the three areas that are represented by the board. They have had a significant budget over time to work with in that area.

[1910]

I have asked them to take on the challenge of finding a model that we can implement provincewide in terms of ongoing implementation of land use plans, with a very real focus on direct community involvement. That's not to say that you want to not accept input from people who live outside of the region, but the bias I've asked them to take is with a view of having a disproportionate number of people on the board from the local communities in the region to give input to that land use planning process.

It is very early. They're just starting that work now, and I expect it's going to take several years to complete that work. It's not something that I think will resolve overnight, but it is something that's been on the plate of this ministry and the integrated land management bureau. We flagged it six months ago, probably, and the process is started.

**B. Simpson:** Thanks for the answer. I would agree. I think a lot of good planning has been done. Now we're in the implementation phase.

There are a lot of questions around implementation and what it looks like. In particular, of course, in the interior.... Well, in fact, it's in more parts of the province now where you have changing circumstances. You have forest health issues and greater access issues, whether it's oil and gas and mineral exploration or species at risk or greater access for recreational purposes or whatever. And lots of people are wondering whether or not the tables should be brought back together to revisit the standing plans and what that iterative process is of making sure that all the work you did actually finds its way to the ground. And yet the world is changing on you as you're trying to do that.

So in order to shorten this process, because I'm going to get the hook here shortly, I'm wondering if it's possible to sometime get a more fulsome briefing around some of the particulars I've got with the existing LRMPs and some of the concerns that are there.

However, there is one pointed question. One of the structural changes and legislative changes that occurred under FRPA is the addition of the "unduly" clause to all of the other stated objectives and values — you know, providing this does not unduly restrict the flow of timber in British Columbia. That clause, as we're seeing in some of the early forest stewardship plans, is constraining the realization of those higher-level values. So there may be a higher-level value for water quality and water flow in a particular watershed, but the stated objective is qualified by the "unduly" clause.

How does the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, which basically has the obligation for these higher-level objectives being realized on the ground, reconcile or rationalize the qualification that's being put on these forest stewardship plans where if there's a water qual-

ity flow objective established in the higher-level plan, we're in fact going to sign off on a qualified statement to achieve that?

This then begs the question of how you enforce that, because you've already qualified it from the outset. Is that a discussion, or is that something that the ministry has examined with respect to those higher-level objectives? If so, what's the nature of that examination? And how do the people of British Columbia have some comfort that those higher-level objectives will be met despite the fact there's a legislative qualifier in the very act that governs these forest stewardship plans?

[1915]

**Hon. P. Bell:** There are two scenarios that I hear. There are the legalized objectives of higher-level plans, and then there are other objectives. Legalized objectives must be met. The statutory decision-maker does not have a choice on whether or not those objectives are met. Other objectives that are not legalized objectives are recommendations and may be met or not, depending on the specific situation. But the legalized objectives must be met, and the timber supply must be framed around those legalized objectives.

**B. Simpson:** From what I've seen in the early forest stewardship plans, that qualifier — the "unduly" qualifier — is put on the legal objectives from the higher-level plans. The government has also changed the due-diligence defence to be a complete defence.

From a legal perspective — and we're hearing that FSPs are becoming more legal documents than actual forester documents, just because of the nature of the structural changes that have occurred — you have a statement of a legal objective, as the minister has stated, with a qualifier that says: "...as long as this does not unduly constrain the flow of timber."

Then you have changes to the due-diligence defence, which is an absolute defence. So you have a legal circumstance there in which I'm not sure how we can meet those stated objectives when the individual who does the work on the ground says: "Well, we said that we would try and achieve it as long as it didn't unduly restrict timber, and we needed that cut." I believe that legally, this sets them up for a legal defence that would work under due diligence.

There's a generalized concern out there that we have set up a legislative legal framework such that we will be qualifying all of these higher-level objectives that are required by law. If we don't obtain them — in a watershed, for example, where the logging practices in the watershed do impact flow and water quality beyond what a water treatment facility can manage — as long as they can say, "Well, we needed the timber," and prove a case that they needed the timber, that higher-level objective is gone.

I'm not sure that I understand the minister's couching of that, because the advice we're being given is quite different. Those higher-level objectives may now

not be achieved, and there's not much we can do about it, because of that "unduly" constraint.

[1920]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I am informed by my most capable and competent deputy ministers, one of whom was quite engaged in the process of the development of that legislation, that in fact the higher-level plans with legal objectives must be met. They're not optional. To be clear, there's a difference between legalized objectives and many of the LRMPs in the province that were not legalized. The member should keep in mind that there are two different.... I think the member's aware of that anyway, actually.

I would like to give an example, though, of how we believe this can function. In the north central coast and north coast land and resource management plan area we did extensive modelling and work in terms of the maintenance of annual allowable cut in the region under ecosystem-based management and within the constraints that are being put on the region. The traditional cut in the region has been about 2½ million cubic metres over the last number of years, although the annual allowable cut was much higher than that.

The modelling that we are doing on north and central coast at this point indicates an annual allowable cut of about 3.1 million cubic metres. But it's a different footprint on the landscape. It's quite a different approach to log harvesting. It requires a much higher level of planning than has been done in the past, and we are pretty confident that we can accomplish the objectives of a sound, strong economy and an environmentally friendly approach to log harvesting through all the work that's gone on.

We are confident it can be achieved. I guess I'll leave it at that.

**B. Simpson:** I think this is probably a longer conversation that needs to be played out a little bit, because the feedback I'm getting on one of the forest stewardship plans that encompasses north coast and central coast is that ecosystem-based management isn't even in the plan. Again, that higher degree of concern, because they're devolving to legal documents.... They're not getting the innovation that everyone had hoped they would get.

I'll leave off at that to pass on to other folks. I will ask my staff to get in touch with your office about sort of a higher-level briefing around the LRMPs and some of the specific questions I have about those.

**Hon. P. Bell:** Certainly, we'd be happy to provide that detailed briefing to the member, but I should just highlight that the reason why EBM has not been included in some of the forest stewardship plans is that it doesn't actually exist yet. It is in the process of development.

There are a couple of pilot projects around EBM right now on the north and central coasts, but it is very early. In fact, we just signed off last week with a different first nation, and the week before with six, on the

development of EBM and the model for the development. That's why EBM is not fully in place yet.

The commitment on the part of the provincial government, to be clear, is full implementation of EBM by March 2009.

**R. Austin:** I'd like to begin by asking a few questions around fisheries issues. Does the minister need to change staff at all?

[1925]

Interjection.

**R. Austin:** Okay.

I'd like to begin by just asking a couple of questions that pertain to the report that came out from the Northwest Institute for Bioregional Research last week. That's *Valuation of the Wild Salmon Economy of the Skeena Watershed*. I know this only came out last week, but can I ask: has the minister had an opportunity to read it yet?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I haven't read it cover to cover, but I certainly have done a fairly detailed review of the executive summary, and staff have briefed me on it as well.

**R. Austin:** I'd just like to ask a very general question. Was the minister surprised at the value of the Skeena watershed in terms of the wild fisheries?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm advised by my staff that I was not surprised at all. We were contemplating that I would say: "Oh, I wasn't surprised. That looked about right to me." The staff were saying: "No, you're right, minister. You weren't surprised." So my staff advise me that I was not surprised in the slightest at the value.

**The Chair:** Please thank your staff for us.

**R. Austin:** Just to put this into context and to make aware to everybody that the minister was not surprised that it turned out to be \$110 million, and just to break this down.... The study said that this \$110 million is broken down so that the freshwater angling was roughly \$9 million, saltwater angling was \$6 million, the commercial fishery on the wild side was \$13.8 million, fish processing was almost \$33 million, added-value processing was nearly \$9 million, salmon-related tourism was \$8 million, the food fishery for the first nations was \$4.2 million, and the fish caught by our Alaskan brethren to the north was almost \$30 million.

That being the case, is the minister concerned at all about the wild fisheries as an economic driver for the people of our coast? And can the minister tell me if he's concerned that the finfish aquaculture that is proposed for the north coast may impact on that wild fishery economy?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I was just recalling my last visit to a fishing store and thinking that it doesn't surprise me at

all that sport fishery is \$9 million. In fact, I think that's probably low, given that I think my last trip was around \$250, and I didn't catch any fish when I went on that trip. So I'm sure that would be more than a fair assessment.

There's no question that the wild fishery is a very important economic driver of the member's area specifically, but I think throughout British Columbia there is a significant economic component to the wild fishery. It's one that I think needs to work in harmony with aquaculture, and certainly, I'm looking forward to the work of the special legislative committee on aquaculture in developing a series of recommendations that reflects a way forward, hopefully, for both industries to work cooperatively. But I don't want to prejudge that. I'm happy to wait for the report to come forward and to do the analysis at that time.

But to be clear, from this minister's perspective and from this government's perspective, we need to ensure that we do everything we possibly can to protect our wild fishery and to have an ongoing form of livelihood for our northern constituents and all constituents.

**R. Austin:** Does the minister have a working agreement with Washington State and the state of Alaska?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands as it relates to fishery is strictly finfish aquaculture — and shellfish aquaculture, pardon me. The question the member asks would be more appropriately asked of the Minister of Environment.

**R. Austin:** I'll do that tomorrow, then. Could I ask: has the province ever looked at what and how Alaska has organized and rebuilt their fisheries around ocean ranching?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I will only dabble at that question briefly, because I have a very real interest in ocean ranching and think that there may be an opportunity to expand the fishery in British Columbia into the venue of ocean ranching as it relates to the Alaskan experience. That said, it doesn't fall under the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands and would be better canvassed under the Minister of the Environment.

[1930]

**R. Austin:** I'd just like to ask a few questions with regards to expanding aquaculture into another species. Regarding the approval of sablefish farming, we had a little discussion in the estimates during the fall. I'd like to know, with regards to the approval of sablefish farming in the 38 B.C. salmon farms, could the minister please advise me as to what the anticipated farm sablefish production will be from the two active sablefish hatcheries. That's Sablefin Hatcheries on Saltspring Island and Edgewater Foods, which is Island Scallops, for 2006.

**Hon. P. Bell:** We don't have that level of information here with us this evening. I was just consulting

with my staff on whether or not we actually have that or if it's part of the required information. We believe it is; we're not absolutely certain of that. It may be measured in terms of biomass — as the number that we may end up having. Certainly, whatever information we do have available — that's not proprietary information, of course, and I think it should be public — we'd be happy to provide either to the member directly or to the special legislative committee on aquaculture at their request. We can provide that individually, as soon as we can track it down.

**R. Austin:** Could the minister please advise me of the status of the approval process for the Brew Bay sablefish farm on Cortez Island, which proposes to be B.C.'s largest finfish farm?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I just have staff reviewing, and we don't show anything under that name in the files. If the member has, perhaps, a company name, it might help us identify the site.

[1935]

**R. Austin:** I don't have a company name, but it's located on Cortez Island. Maybe later on I will contact the minister and pass on the details that I have.

Is the minister aware that we in British Columbia have a very successful \$30 million wild sablefish fishery and that that fishery is regarded as a model for comanagement and sustainability?

**Hon. P. Bell:** My staff advise me that, yes, I am aware of it.

**R. Austin:** Is the minister also aware that the location of these potential sablefish farms is in the same place where the wild juvenile sablefish spend the first two years and that they would then be exposed to those farms before migrating out to the deep ocean?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I think what the member is referring to, probably, was brought to me by a meeting of the sablefish association. I forget the exact name of it — but the group that fishes sablefish here in British Columbia.

I probably received the same briefing from the members as the member opposite is identifying right now, because I do recall that meeting. Certainly, the information that was brought forward would be the same information I received. But the process for the application of a new aquaculture licence, as the member will know, is fairly onerous and lengthy, including public reviews and extensive sorts of documentation.

If a new farm were to be actually applied for, there would be a thorough process, under which anyone that objected to the farm would be able to voice their concerns, and they would be dealt with by the decision-makers.

**R. Austin:** I understand that that will be dealt with by the decision-makers. Once the decision-makers have made a decision on the approval of a new fish farm,

ultimately, is it the minister who makes that decision at the end of the day and signs off on it? Or does the regulatory process allow the off-limits or hands-off government approach to...? What I'm really asking is: who actually, ultimately, signs off on the approval of a new fish farm?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The delegated decision-maker within the ministry makes that decision and signs off on that decision. The decision-making authority is physically delegated, as opposed to being removed statutorily. So it is delegated from myself to the deputy. The deputy then delegates it to the appropriate decision-maker. Any of those delegations could be removed if government saw fit to remove those delegated models.

**R. Austin:** Under the current process, the minister, then, never makes a different choice than what the delegated responsible person chooses to do. Is that correct?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I can only speak for myself. I have not overridden any delegated decision-maker's decision-making process. I do think that a politician does so at their peril because, inevitably, it looks political.

The member for Surrey-Whalley probably gets tired of me saying this, but I'll say it one more time anyway. I think government's role is to establish the policy framework under which decisions are made, and then either the delegated or statutory decision-maker or an arm's-length process should actually implement those decisions.

**R. Austin:** In the fall we had a discussion about the experience of aquaculture in Norway. In Norway they've implemented a process where they keep a certain portion of their coastline off limits to aquaculture. I'd just like to ask the minister: has the province ever considered implementing protective programs for wild marine populations here in British Columbia?

[1940]

**Hon. P. Bell:** In fact, there are several ecological reserves on the coast right now where there is no aquaculture is allowed. So there are actually some current examples of areas that are precluded from any aquaculture licences. I guess the model would be somewhat similar to what the member is articulating.

I appreciate the level of knowledge that the member has been able to build up on aquaculture, since he's engaged in the work of the special legislative committee. I think that bodes well for the outcome of the committee, because I expect that we will see some far more advanced initiatives around aquaculture going into the future than we have in the past.

This is kind of what's important here. This industry really does have a future, but I think it has a future under a far higher-level approach to aquaculture. The past does not reflect the future here — similar to what we've done in forestry. I think the forestry practices

that we performed in the '50s, the '60s and the '70s don't reflect the practices of today.

What we're seeing is a maturing of the industry. For me, the industry has shown a very real interest in developing into a more sustainable model than, perhaps, what people have viewed they've had in the past. As opposed to what one might think would be fear that the industry might have of the work that the special legislative committee is doing, they're actually looking forward to the report and the work that the committee is doing and encouraging them to develop new and innovative strategies.

We have a future in front of us that's quite positive around aquaculture, and I think that history will show that this special legislative committee will play a significant role in that development.

**R. Austin:** Could the minister advise me how much gravel has been taken out of the Fraser River in the last few years — each year?

**Hon. P. Bell:** We have a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to remove up to half a million cubic metres per year from the Fraser River. We have not achieved that numerical objective in either of the two years of the agreement. We could provide the member, I'm sure, with exact numbers, but if memory serves me correctly, the first year of the agreement was in the order of 200,000 cubic metres.

**R. Austin:** With respect to the new relationship, could the minister advise me as to what resources have been set aside for consultation with first nations — in terms of new money, as of April 1, 2006, with respect to fish-farm applications?

[1945]

**Hon. P. Bell:** The document is a number of pages and has lots of different numbers on it, so it's hard for us to add them up very quickly. But a very early look at the document indicates \$400,000-plus new dollars available for a variety of strategies with first nations around aquaculture in terms of capacity-building, in terms of working with the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association, developing area management plans, working with a number of the MTTC first nations in the Broughton Archipelago to support an MOU, and so on. It's quite a variety, and just the very early scan is that it's \$400,000. We believe the number is larger than that. We'd be happy to provide the member with specific details in the coming days.

**R. Austin:** I would like to have a look at that document just to see what the details are.

A few weeks ago I attended a conference in Nanaimo along with the member for Nanaimo-Parksville. At that seminar that day they were deciding what the priorities were for this year in terms of research. The Pacific Salmon Forum had put up \$600,000 this year towards research, specifically on sea lice and

other issues, but they were deciding what the priorities were.

Could the minister advise me as to what allocation has been made from his department this year in terms of new research money?

**Hon. P. Bell:** On a very quick scan, it's several hundred thousand dollars specific to research and development objectives around aquaculture.

One of the ones that I am personally interested in is closed containment, sea-based technologies. There was a \$100,000 grant provided there very recently and some other moneys allocated as well. Again, for specific details we'd be happy to provide those to the member.

**R. Austin:** Again, I would like to have those specific details.

Has there been any money set aside to help foster the Marine Harvest and CAAR agreement? From what I understand from speaking to the minister, he's very hopeful that this could be a model in terms of trying to bring the two disparate groups together. I realize that the minister supported that agreement by paying for the moving of the fish in one fish farm to another location. But besides that, are there any funds set aside to support that agreement as a whole?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The member is quite right in pointing out that there was half a million dollars provided to support the agreement between Marine Harvest and CAAR. Part of that money was used to help relocate fish from the one farm that was of particular concern. But there were also additional moneys used — and they're currently being used — for tarping trials, which is another technology that is thought to support the minimization of sea lice.

[1950]

Any other money that was left over — and we don't have the final numbers in, so I can't provide the member with the exact numbers at this point in time — from the movement of those fish is also being used to continue to support the CAAR-Marine Harvest agreement. Of that, the total sum of dollars provided by the ministry was half a million dollars.

**R. Austin:** Noting the time now and that there are many other people who would like to ask questions, I'm going to leave aside these questions. I'll speak to the Minister of Environment tomorrow with a few more.

I had one other question. It's a local matter. It pertains to a situation in my home community of Terrace, where there's been a complaint about an egg farm up there that has had practices that have led to a large number of flies being attracted to the area. FIRB, the Farm Industry Review Board, came in, did an assessment and said that there were two or three items that this facility was not up to in terms of code.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

Now, I was just wondering who enforces.... Once FIRB makes a decision and says, "These are the three things that this facility is lacking in," who then enforces that?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The process that FIRB would follow if there's not compliance on the issue is that they would apply for a court order, which would then be enforced.

**R. Austin:** My constituency assistant in Terrace, when contacting them, was told that they don't do the enforcement and that we should go back to the city. This is within municipal boundaries. They don't enforce. They just come and do a review and then state what's lacking. My question is: where do I go with this?

**Hon. P. Bell:** We're kind of both right here, I guess. Each individual farmer is protected under the Right to Farm Act from someone taking legal action against that particular operator. Once FIRB has ruled against that operator and said, "You're out of compliance in these areas," then the complainant, the city or FIRB could apply for a court order at that point in time.

When the member's constituency assistant was told to refer it to the city.... It's not normal that FIRB would be the entity that would apply for the court order. Typically, it's either the complainant or the local jurisdiction that would apply for the court order. That would be part of the normal process.

Once FIRB makes the ruling, the producer is no longer protected under the Right to Farm Act. That opens the door for the normal processes that would occur if a person did something offensive or painted your wall or whatever.

**R. Austin:** Thank you very much, hon. Chair. Those are all the questions I have right now.

**G. Robertson:** I'd like to direct to the minister a few questions, starting with the B.C. organic industry. I was surprised not to see organics mentioned in the service plan anywhere, given that organic agriculture is probably the fastest-growing sector in the B.C. food industry. In my time in the industry, there was over 20-percent growth for 15 consecutive years. Certainly, a potent cluster of activity has developed here in B.C. — to the tune of many hundreds of millions of dollars of activity.

[1955]

The objective in the service plan, I note, of "enhanced international reputation for the quality of B.C. products...." Surely there's no finer quality than B.C. organics. How is the ministry supporting organics directly in the years to come?

**Hon. P. Bell:** The member quite rightly points out that we should be proud of the organic sector that's developed over the last number of years in British Columbia. There is very, very real potential for increased economic activity as a result of the organic sector. It's certainly one of the areas that we want to promote and move forward.

In fact, last summer I visited an organic farm in.... I believe it was Richmond. It was interesting, because very young farmers, relative to the other farms I visited through the summer months, were very excited about the business they were in — and a very profitable operation as well. Their products were selling for a premium.

We actually have some interesting statistics in the guide that we produced around organics. I'd be happy to provide the member with a copy. It's one of the initiatives that we've taken to really break out our organic industry in British Columbia relative to all other industries. It's a very handy little guide, about 25 pages. There are a number of pages.... It looks, in fact, exactly like this one here; although, we're not allowed to use proposals, so I won't be holding this. But it has some very interesting statistics on organics.

The member asked, specifically, what it is we are doing to support the organic industry. I have a list. I'll give the member a few of the items on the list that I think have been positive steps. The first one, I think, is that we are one of only two provinces in Canada that have separate organic regulations, with Quebec being the other province. This is being done to help open up the European Union access. One of the issues that the EU has is the ability to send organic products in. That's one of the things they're looking for. We've done that.

We've also supported the notion around organic farming at a national level. At any opportunity at a federal-provincial meeting to mention the importance of our organic industry in demonstrating that industry at a federal level, we do.

We also recently provided a grant of \$50,000 to the COABC to provide real national leadership on the organics file in terms of developing the national standards and allowing international access. That just occurred a few days ago.

I think one of the other key points I'd like to make is that the Farm Industry Review Board did, at the request of the previous Minister of Agriculture, engage in a specialty review of the supply-managed industry. As a result of that work, it created a model that allows for new entrants — specialty entrants and, specifically, organic entrants.

[2000]

What we're seeing in all the supply-managed industries now is an opportunity for new producers. Many of those new producers come from the organic sector to expand their production as it relates to eggs and chicken and dairy products, in particular. We have quite a lengthy list — not items that you would necessarily put in a service plan.

The focus of the service plan in terms of effectively marketing our products out to urban British Columbia, I think, is really reflective of our focus on organic products, because that's a great product that you can market.

**G. Robertson:** Beyond the recent \$50,000 grant to the COABC, has the minister been working directly with his federal counterparts to ensure that a federal

organic certification standard is completed in the very near term?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I failed to introduce the most recent addition to the team here, Daphne Stancil, who is ADM in the ministry. Actually, as luck would have it, Daphne currently is leading the federal table on organics on behalf of British Columbia and is moving that file forward in an expedient fashion. So British Columbia is taking a leading role in the development of organics.

I know the member has a very real interest in the organics file, and I'd be happy to arrange for a more detailed review of the activities with him. Also, I'd be interested in receiving input from the member on his view of how we can continue to move this file along.

**G. Robertson:** Thank you for that offer.

I'd like to shift to a much broader topic here. I'm speaking of food security and provincial food security — the big picture of our food security in the event of a catastrophe, in the event of the daily and nightly trucks that arrive from all over the world, primarily California, to deliver our food.... Has the ministry developed any kind of a food security plan in the event that we no longer have trucks reliably arriving over our borders to supply us with, I believe, over half of the food that we eat on a daily basis here?

[2005]

**Hon. P. Bell:** We're trying to accumulate exact numbers for the member. Unable to do so in a very short period of time and cognizant of the need to move this process along, I'll try and do it with rough numbers at this point. I'd be happy to work with the member on more specifics at a future time, or if members opposite want to continue to focus on this, that's fine with me as well.

Of all of the food product that we consume in British Columbia, about 60 percent of it is produced in British Columbia. We also export a significant volume of food outside of British Columbia, including, I think, in the order of \$600 million worth of fish annually.

The number that we were trying to calculate very quickly for the member opposite was: if you added in the volume of food that we exported to the 60 percent that we grow and consume, would that equal the total food product, and would we have self-sufficiency? We were unable to do that calculation in the period of time that we had, but we'd be happy to work with the member on that calculation.

In answer to the member's second question — is anyone working on a plan or a strategy to ensure that B.C. is maximizing its production, and in the event of an emergency, would they be able to provide their own needs? — that is a process that the Minister of Agriculture and Lands and the Ministry of Health are working on right now.

**G. Robertson:** I hope that is in the works so that in the event — as we have seen in other parts of the world

— when disaster or catastrophe strikes, food is paramount right off the bat.

Having plans in the works is a perilous state to be in. Having to add up the numbers on the fly here in an estimates debate.... While I appreciate the effort, I hope the next time we sit down that the province does have a credible food security plan in the event of potential catastrophe so that we're prepared and able to feed ourselves.

I want to shift quickly over to another topic more broadly related to health. Four of the goals that I had noticed in the service plan include ag and food systems that are environmentally sustainable and promote human, plant and animal health.

The service plan also discusses promotion of sustainable agriculture in some detail. My concern is the use of the words "sustainability" and "human health" in the same sentences as talking about synthetic fertilizer runoff, pesticide use, prohibited pesticides in other jurisdictions, persistent organic pollutants — many of the challenges that intensive and industrial agricultural systems are facing around the world right now in industrialized countries.

I'm curious if the ministry is tracking total synthetic fertilizer, pesticide and herbicide use in the province and has a clear sense of how much of the substances that are dangerous or potentially dangerous to human health, animal health, plant health, ecosystem health and sustainability are actually being introduced into the ecosystems of British Columbia at this time. Is this being tracked, and if so, would there be recommendations related to how that's managed in the future?

[2010]

**Hon. P. Bell:** The member identifies an issue that I think will be a growing issue in the years to come, given the focus of Agriculture on such a small component of the overall land base in the province. I think it presents a very real challenge for us.

To address that, the ministry has introduced a program, the establishment of environmental farm plans, which does much of what the member just articulated in terms of ensuring appropriate environmental practices and the monitoring of those practices on farms.

The goal translated into a completion in the '05-06 year of 360 farms with completed plans. The target for '06-07 is an increase from 364 to 800. In '07-08 it's up to 1,200. In the '08-09 fiscal year it's up to 1,400. So the member will note that in the service plan we have a very specific objective intended to address the concerns of the member.

**G. Robertson:** I will appreciate hearing the news that environmental farm plans have a planned robust growth curve ahead. Again, real concern that the enforcement side of that, the ability for farms to be able to implement their plans.... It's one thing to have a plan; another to implement it; another to be sure that these plans are actually functioning.

The challenge is to resource the field staff to ensure that this is taking place, particularly in the parts of the

province like the Fraser Valley where farms are so close to aquifers, in particular. It will be really critical that the ministry follows through on the support side of that, being sure that those farm plans do get supported.

I want to shift quickly to another overarching mega-issue. I'm going for the big themes here tonight. We're going to talk.... I have a few questions related to soil erosion or soil conservation. In this case, soil is really the primary resource of this ministry, I guess, if it had to be identified — no argument, I don't think, anywhere that it is anything but the foundation of our civilization. We rely on it for our existence.

[2015]

Soil erosion. The challenges to every civilization that we know of to date is.... There are frightening realities. We have seen soil erosion take down civilizations. We've seen soil erosion in this century on large, large landscapes — be it in the United States in the Great Plains through the 30s; be it in the Soviet Union, with the Virgin Lands project in the '50s and '60s and right into the '80s that wiped out vast grasslands; challenges in China and Mongolia now, creating dust bowls....

In the same vein as these big-picture questions, I'm curious if the ministry has an overall inventory and perspective and is tracking, for lack of a more complex terminology, a soil inventory for the province. This is how much we have; this is where we're losing it. This is what we need to be concerned about: to be able to manage it at a very high level and implement soil conservation plans accordingly, for the people of British Columbia to understand our soil resource — how it's faring, and how it's being managed by the ministry.

**Hon. P. Bell:** The member gets into an interesting area here, and there's kind of a combination of answers, I suppose. The federal government actually does have an ongoing erosion measurement model, where they are looking at soil losses in each of the regions. We do work with the federal government in that area. But I think the real answer to the member's question comes in two other areas. They're both represented in this ministry.

I've already touched on environmental farm planning. A key part of environmental farm planning is the protection of soil, so the previous answer, with regards to part of our service plan being focused on environmental farm plans, addresses part of the member's concern.

The other component is the work that this ministry does around land use planning and, in fact, figuring out where the most appropriate areas are to have intensive agriculture, where we should be less intensive, and how we manage the soils.

That's why the makeup of this ministry, in my view — being Agriculture and Lands with the integrated land management bureau attached to it — is such a great fit. I think the Premier should be commended on the relationship he was able to develop with this ministry, because I think it will allow us to move forward with agriculture into the 21st century and really have a

vibrant sector that is capable of meeting the needs of British Columbians.

**G. Robertson:** One last question. I referenced a few situations globally — be it in the Soviet Union, in Mongolia, in the United States — where marginal lands were converted into agricultural use, and plows were driven into more fragile soils. We certainly are toying with the notions of creating a lot more agriculture in the north of B.C., where the soil structures are more fragile and less understanding — obviously, a lot less history dealing with the soils of those natures. Therefore, to learn from the mistakes of our neighbours in the past.... The shift to add agricultural land in the north of B.C., which flirts with the potential for a dust bowl in our north, is of great concern.

[2020]

I'm curious if there is expertise in the ministry around developing these new agricultural lands in the north and the perils of doing so, given the damage that's been done around the world in other places in similar situations.

**Hon. P. Bell:** There is a considerable amount of work going on right now, analyzing where agriculture could appropriately take place, and where it would be inappropriate for agriculture to take place. I'm expecting some more details of that from my ministry staff in the coming months.

**B. Ralston:** I'd like to thank my colleagues for the questions they've posed. I want to return now to the Agricultural Land Commission and the appointments process. That's where I think we left off. What the minister said in the fall was that he would review résumés if they applied for reappointment. Given that for three members of the coast panel, their terms expire at the end of this month, which is just over three and a half weeks away, has the minister reviewed those résumés with a view to reappointing them, or not?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Mr. Chair, I've not.

**B. Ralston:** My experience is that the appointment process — given that the minister would have to review the appointment, make a recommendation and forward it to the Premier's office for a decision — is generally not a very compact process. So I'm wondering why there's been this delay in considering these reappointments.

**Hon. P. Bell:** The member is incorrect when he indicates that the appointments would be forwarded to the Premier's office. They're done by order-in-council, which is an order of the Lieutenant-Governor and cabinet. As to the timing process, I would anticipate receiving recommendations from the Agricultural Land Commission in the next week or so. That would be an appropriate amount of time for a final decision.

**B. Ralston:** Well, I suppose in formal, legal terms, they're appointments by order-in-council, but surely, the minister is not suggesting that there's not some mechanism whereby these appointments are checked, reviewed or signed off through the Premier's office — is he?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'll walk the member through the process one more time. The applications are received by the board resourcing office. They're vetted out by the board resourcing office for their ability to perform the function. The chair of the Agricultural Land Commission would then review the applications that are on file and bring them forward to me — along with the existing board members that have indicated their willingness to continue sitting on a panel — for a final recommendation to cabinet. The cabinet then reviews the applications. I discuss my recommendation. I'm available for questions. There's a decision made by cabinet at that time.

**B. Ralston:** So, then, when does the minister anticipate taking either the reappointments or the new appointments for the south coast panel before cabinet? Given that the cabinet meets, ordinarily, once a week and that there are three or four meetings of cabinet before the expiration of these terms, does the minister have a timetable for these appointments?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Prior to May 1, 2006.

**B. Ralston:** And given that there are six regional panels in the structure, can the minister advise, or have his staff advise him, how many of the appointments expire at the end of April 2006?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Ten.

**B. Ralston:** Just so we're clear — and, I guess, maybe I'm a bit slow this evening.... We've discussed the three on the south coast panel. Is the minister saying that those other seven members of the panels have not applied for reappointment and are not being considered for reappointment?

[2025]

**Hon. P. Bell:** No, I'm sorry; I'm not saying that. There are, as of May 1, ten appointments to be made. They could be reappointments; they could be new appointments. But there are ten positions that are expiring on May 1, 2006, and would require either new appointments or reappointments.

**B. Ralston:** Is the minister, then, saying that of these ten positions, none of the ten present incumbents have applied for reappointment at this point? They're all going leave it to the last minute. Is that the proposal?

**Hon. P. Bell:** No. I'm not sure if there's some confusion here, so let me walk the member through the process.



When there are appointments coming due, there's a public process. People are aware of the appointments. If anyone would like to know when the appointments are expiring, that's available on the Agricultural Land Commission website — for all 18 panel members. If they anticipate an interest in sitting on one of the panels, they're free to submit a resumé to the board resourcing office. That information is available as well.

The board resourcing office would then review all of the potential applicants for the positions on the Agricultural Land Commission. The chair of the Agricultural Land Commission would then review the existing applicants and the panel members who have indicated that they are interested in staying on and make recommendations through to me. I think the member understands the process from there forward.

**B. Ralston:** Perhaps I understand the process a bit better, then. Is the minister saying that it's likely that the board resourcing office is considering either new applications or applications for reappointment and that those will be forwarded to the minister in due course, within the next several weeks?

**Hon. P. Bell:** That's correct.

**B. Ralston:** In which ministry does the board resourcing office sit?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Labour and Citizens' Services.

**B. Ralston:** One of the questions that was pursued in estimates in the fall was the structure of the regional panels. It's widely regarded that these particular panels are particularly susceptible to political pressure, given the small number of people that are on them, and that they are inclined to look to specific and local interests rather than the provincial mandate that they're given.

At a recent chamber of commerce meeting, which was attended by members of the chambers of commerce from Delta, Surrey, Langley, Abbotsford and Chilliwack.... They held a meeting a couple of weeks ago in Langley. Steve Thomson, who's the executive director of the B.C. Ag Council, speaking at this forum, said that he.... There was certainly debate. He wasn't — I've clarified this with him personally since — taking a position on behalf of the council, but it was his personal view that the structure needed to be reviewed, particularly where it concerned large applications of the type of land that was excluded in Abbotsford — or the Barnston Island application. It's a 1,500-acre island, and there's an application to exclude 1,100 acres of it from the reserve.

Given that comment from a very experienced and highly regarded player, or participant, in the agricultural industry in British Columbia, does the minister think it might be time to retreat from the position that he took so vigorously in the fall and, given the position of Mr. Thompson, open himself to a reconsideration of the regional structure of the Agricultural Land Commission?

[2030]

**Hon. P. Bell:** No. I'm very pleased with the model that we have right now. In fact, I will take the model and our record under the agricultural land reserve and stand it up against the 1990s any day of the week.

This government stands for protecting land in the agricultural land reserve. It stands for building a long-term, sustainable agriculture industry. That's why we have a parliamentary secretary for agriculture planning. That's why we're very focused on building an industry that's sustainable in the long-term future. That's why we're seeing land coming out of the agricultural land reserve at a lower rate than has ever occurred, and that's exactly why we're seeing an agricultural land reserve that's had inclusions at greater than the rate of exclusion — to the point where the agricultural land reserve is larger today than at any time in the history of British Columbia.

The notion that the system is not working.... I would encourage the member to look at the history of it. When the panel system operated under the method that the member is advocating for, in fact, there was more land coming out of the agricultural land reserve than there is today, in a significant quantity.

**B. Ralston:** I know I've hit a nerve when the minister heads off into political rhetoric rather than answering the question. I've given a view of a very respected member of the agricultural community in the province, well known to the minister. He expressed that view publicly. Is the minister not at least prepared to give me the courtesy of an answer here?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm sorry. I thought I was clear, before I broke into my rant there, on what the answer was. No. I'm very supportive of the existing panel system.

**B. Ralston:** The minister has headed off and wants to defend some of the decisions that the panel has taken. Last time he defended the Abbotsford exclusion. Part of the defence or the approbation he offered for that decision was that the land was of relatively poor quality and not terribly suited to agriculture. Is it the minister's position, set out as a policy position, that where the land is of relatively poor quality, it's better excluded from the reserve than not?

**Hon. P. Bell:** No. As I said — and I apologize if this sounds like a political rant, because it's not intended to — this government does support the notion of protecting our agricultural land. I think we've been very clear on that, and I think the record of this government speaks for itself in terms of the protection of agricultural land. If the member would care to compare notes on annual exclusions, I'd be happy to do that.

I think that if I have made that comment in the past, it's intended to say that if there is to be an exclusion considered, in my view, that exclusion should be done in a way that takes land that is the poorest-quality land available, as opposed to productive lands, out of the agricultural land reserve. The view that I would share

and the belief that I have as a minister is that we need to protect the lands that have the highest agricultural values. We need to protect all agricultural lands. If there is an exclusion, we should always direct that exclusion to an area that has minimum agricultural values, as opposed to removing high-value property.

**B. Ralston:** That's not a view that's shared by everyone, obviously. Let me just give you a quote from an article called "Use It or Lose It." It's in *B.C. Business*, about the agricultural land reserve. The quote is this: "If you use up all the so-called poor agricultural land, where are you going to put up your pig farms, your mushroom farms and the poultry?" That comment....

When I have the minister's attention, perhaps I can continue.

**The Chair:** Member, continue.

**B. Ralston:** That quote is from one Noel Roddick, who's doubtlessly well known to the minister.

Interjection.

**B. Ralston:** I'll repeat it. I appreciate that the minister was distracted.

Critics say that even development of marginal farmland is a risk. It places houses that much closer to good farmland and ups the risk of conflict. It also limits the scope of farming.

This is the quote: "'If you use up all the so-called poor agricultural land,' points out Roddick" — Noel Roddick — "where are you going to put your pig farms, your mushroom farms and the poultry?"

[2035]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I'm sorry if the member feels that I'm advocating for the removal of any land from the agricultural land reserve. I simply stated that if an exclusion was to be considered, it should only be focused on the poorest-quality lands.

**B. Ralston:** As the minister has pointed out many times, he sets the policy framework for the commission, provides the resources and demands the accountability. Here's someone who's very knowledgeable about agriculture making a public statement about so-called poor agricultural land. The minister clearly disagrees, and I'm not quite sure why the minister disagrees with that eminently sensible statement from someone very knowledgeable. Noel Roddick is very knowledgeable about agriculture. Does the minister want to expand upon his reasons?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I don't disagree with the article the member's quoting from. I'm not sure why he's indicating that he believes I do.

**B. Ralston:** Perhaps if I might.... The reason I'm suggesting the minister appears to disagree is because he said that he thought the poorest-quality agricultural

land should be the agricultural land that's excluded from the agricultural land reserve.

Interjection.

**B. Ralston:** Well, yes, I'm getting distracted by the minister, but I'm sure I'm not the first one.

I would suggest to the minister, for his comment, that the policy position he's enunciating as Minister of Agriculture is inconsistent with this statement, inconsistent with good agricultural practice and inconsistent with the statute itself. It doesn't look to the future of agricultural lands and other related agricultural operations that obviously require land on which to operate.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I believe I've answered this question several times already. I will try and answer it one more time. I agree with the statement articulated by Mr. Roddick. My position is that if there is to be any land considered for exclusion — and I should say that: if there is — then it should only be land of minimum value.

I won't be answering that question again, if the member cares to ask it again.

**B. Ralston:** Well, the minister may choose not to answer the question. It's evident that that's the approach he's going to take on this question, but I will ask it again.

The justification the minister offered for the Abbotsford exclusion was that it was land of poor agricultural quality, and therefore, he supported the decision of the commission. I put it to the minister again that that's inconsistent with the act, inconsistent with good agricultural practice, inconsistent with the long-term viability of the agricultural land reserve and, indeed, of the agricultural industry in the province. So does the minister want to change his position?

**Hon. P. Bell:** Asked and answered.

**B. Ralston:** The minister likes to quote some statistics about the rates of exclusion. I have statistics on the non-panel record of exclusions from 1974 to 1999, which show that the total non-panel approval rate of exclusions was 59 percent, and the panel record of exclusions for the 2001 to 2005 fiscal years was 71.5 percent.

Will the minister agree that the panel system that he supports has led to a higher rate of exclusion of agricultural land from the agricultural land reserve?

[2040]

**Hon. P. Bell:** I don't have that at my fingertips back to 1972 for the member opposite, so I'm unable to comment on that entire period, but I can comment on the period 1996 to 2000, and then 2001 to 2005. In a review of that, the number of applications received for those two five-year periods.... For 1996 to 2000 there were a total of 2,728 applications received, versus 2,473 applications, for a reduction of 9 percent. There are

fewer applications being received annually than there have been historically.

I think a better quantitative measure that the member should look at would be the amount of land that was applied for exclusion and the amount of land that was actually excluded. I think that's a better quantitative measure than simply looking at the number of applications. In the period 1996 to 2000 there was a total of 21,147 hectares applied for. There was a refusal rate of 3,714 hectares in that period of time. In the period 2001 to 2005 there were only 11,147 hectares applied for — so that's down from 21,100 — but interestingly, the total number refused during that application process was 4,183 hectares.

If I can sum this up for the member, the amount of land applied for reduced from 21,000 — round numbers — to 11,000. The amount of land refused was increased during that same period of time. Again, the

member knows my position on the panel system. I believe it's working very well.

**The Chair:** Member, noting the time.

**B. Ralston:** Yes. Just before I move the appropriate resolution, I want to clarify that what I was speaking of in the 2001 to 2005 period was acres. It's 71.5 percent acres considered, approved and refused. And '74 to '99, total acres considered, approved and refused was 59 percent.

Noting the hour, I would move that the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 8:45 p.m.



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