

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday, February 5, 2020

COMMITTEE ROOM

Vital Work of the Forestry Transition Team

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Chair)
Hugh MacKay (Vice-Chair)
Rafah DiCostanzo
Keith Irving
Brendan Maguire
Hon. Pat Dunn
Tory Rushton
Claudia Chender
Lisa Roberts

[Hon. Geoff MacLellan replaced Hugh MacKay]
[Tim Houston replaced Hon. Pat Dunn]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Chair of the Forestry Transition Team

Kelliann Dean - Deputy Minister,
Intergovernmental Affairs

Julie Towers - Deputy Minister,
Lands and Forestry

Ava Czapalay - Associate Deputy Minister,
Labour and Advanced Education



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2020

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

VICE-CHAIR

Hugh MacKay

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development to order. This is the February 5, 2020 meeting. I am Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, the Chair of the committee and the MLA for Lunenburg.

The committee will be receiving a presentation from the Chair of the Forestry Transition Team, Kelliann Dean, Deputy Minister; and representatives of the team: Julie Towers, Deputy Minister of Lands and Forestry; and Ava Czapalay, Associate Deputy Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

I'll ask the committee members to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'd like to welcome Mr. Rushton to the committee. This is your first official meeting, so welcome.

Our legislative counsel today is Mr. Gordon Hebb; and our dear clerk, Darlene Henry - this is her last committee meeting, and we will miss you. Let's be gentle with her as she rolls out to retirement. Those of you who come to committee would not know all the work that goes into being the clerk. She is so on the ball with her communications and preparing for the meetings and keeping me, as the Chair, informed. We're going to really miss you. I know you'll be replaced by somebody who is just as astute as you because all the committee clerks that we have are very, very good organizers and committee workers. All the best in your retirement.

I just want to give some reminders for people to have their phones turned off or on vibrate. We are not allowed to take any photos or recordings, except the media, during the proceedings of the meeting. Washrooms and coffee are to my left, and if there is an emergency, we'll leave by Granville Street and meet up at the Grand Parade Square by St. Paul's Church. Members and witnesses, please wait to be recognized by me, the Chair, so that your microphone can be appropriately turned on for recording purposes.

I will ask our witnesses to introduce themselves. Ms. Dean, maybe you can introduce the team you brought with you and you can follow right into your opening remarks.

KELLIANN DEAN: Thank you very much for inviting us today. As you know, on January 3rd, Premier McNeil announced a transition team to provide advice to government on short- and long-term solutions for Nova Scotia's forestry sector.

The mandate of our team is to advise on short-term support for affected workers and businesses throughout the forestry sector, advise on potential areas of investment related to the \$50 million transition fund, and identify longer-term and innovative approaches for the forestry industry in Nova Scotia while ensuring an ecologically sustainable and globally competitive forestry sector for the province.

I'm pleased to share information today on behalf of the nine-member Forestry Transition Team. I'm joined by my colleagues: Lands and Forestry Deputy Minister Julie Towers, and Labour and Advanced Education Associate Deputy Minister Ava Czapalay. Simon d'Entremont, the Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines, is the fourth member from within government. In asking me to lead this team, the Premier was very clear that Nova Scotia needs a strong forestry sector, that we need to find the path forward together with people and businesses directly involved in forestry.

I would also like to thank the five external members who are at the table with us on the transition team. They're working countless hours listening to people from all areas of the sector and sharing their advice, which is rooted in their own experience and expertise. The members are Jeff Bishop, Executive Director of Forest Nova Scotia; Doug Ledwidge, President and CEO of Ledwidge Lumber; Debbie Reeves, Chair of the Large Private Non-Industrial Landowners of Nova Scotia; Greg Watson, Manager at North Nova Forest Owners Co-op; as well as Don Bureaux, President of the Nova Scotia Community College.

Many more voices are being heard. We have met or spoken with members of associations and stakeholder groups, sawmill owners, woodlot owners, contractors, as well as subject matter experts. Each of us is attending meetings and information sessions, taking calls, reviewing letters and proposals, and listening. All ideas and concerns are brought to the table to guide our discussions and advice. Taking on this work, we knew it would be a difficult and uncertain time for many people across the province, and government made a commitment to help.

Our first priority as a transition team was to assist workers and businesses and find ways to keep people working. Even before the transition team met, we established a toll-free line so that people could find out what help was available and where. More than 430 people have called so far.

People who have been laid off with urgent needs can now access emergency assistance funding through local Access Nova Scotia centres. This is also available to self-employed workers. A confidential toll-free line is also open for anyone who needs emotional support. About 15 information sessions have been held across the province so far with our federal partners. Here people are learning about jobs that are available, how to apply for them, training opportunities, and also about employment insurance. More than 200 people attended the first six sessions in Pictou County.

We have been hearing loud and clear that people want to keep working in Nova Scotia. We need skilled and talented people in the forestry sector of today and tomorrow and in other areas of our economy. My colleague, Ava, will speak to the new \$1.5 million apprenticeship initiative that helps workers fast-track through training and certification free of charge so that they can get back into the workforce more quickly.

We want to keep people working. That's why an additional \$7 million was allocated for silviculture and road programs for Crown land and private land. Contractors and woodlot owners can start applying for this funding on February 14th. The Department of Lands and Forestry is also talking to Northern Pulp about how work can continue on Crown lands licensed to the company.

Contractors told us they needed help covering payments on their equipment. They can now access a repayable line of credit through their local credit union of up to \$180,000, guaranteed by the province. We've allocated \$5 million from the transition fund for this initiative.

Finding markets for wood chips and other residuals is a priority for the sector. On Monday, government issued an RFP to convert six public buildings to wood heat using chips and other lower grade wood. While we know this is on a smaller scale, it's a start and it could provide a new market for some suppliers. Private sector operators have been looking for new opportunities, and we're considering how government can best support their efforts while minimizing any international trade risk. We worked hard to earn an

exclusion from U.S. duties for our lumber, and we achieved that because our industry operates based on fair market principles.

Government, however, can assist industry by working with the federal government and our contacts in key markets to open doors and raise concerns about trade barriers, such as plant health restrictions in the EU that make it difficult to export.

Our work to date has been focused on forestry sector workers and businesses in the short term. We are not done; more initiatives are in the works. While those continue, our focus is turning to longer term opportunities. We want to work with the sector to identify new market opportunities and innovative approaches that support a globally competitive forestry sector. We need diversification, and we need to increase the value of our forests.

The Forest Nova Scotia AGM is coming up next week, and we look forward to hearing directly from people who work in forestry about their ideas. I'll now give the floor to my colleagues and look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: I'm honoured to sit on the Forestry Transition Team. My primary interest is how we can best respond to the needs of forestry workers today and planning for the skills and workforce needs for the future of the forestry sector. I have worked in the education and training sector for more than 33 years.

Whether people need to access short-term support, get help finding a new job, or get introduced to new employment opportunities through retraining and certification, I'm pleased to say that the province, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, and our partners such as Nova Scotia Works and the Nova Scotia Community College have a range of programs that can help. We have heard that most people want to stay in Nova Scotia, and we want to help them do that. My department works with all major sector associations, and these partnerships are helping us identify labour gaps as well as job opportunities.

A few weeks ago, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and the Nova Scotia Community College launched an initiative designed in direct response to the needs of workers. Each person who comes forward from the forestry sector can have a one-on-one assessment of their individual training and work experience and work with someone to develop a customized training plan to achieve their goals. Some workers will pursue apprenticeship in a skilled trade as a career option, while others with work experience in a trade may challenge for certification. Others may want to pursue a completely different career path. All of these options are available.

We have a range of programs that may be suitable for all different needs, and our people are ready to help.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Towers.

JULIE TOWERS: This is an area I have been immersed in for over 35 years, since graduate school at university in New Brunswick: as a wildlife biologist, looking at forest operations; as the executive director for forest, parks, and wildlife; and now as the Deputy Minister of Lands and Forestry. These are people that I have known since university and that I have worked with in the field. It's very much something that I deal with every day, and I'm glad to be here to help provide information. This is an incredibly important sector in this province.

I know it's a difficult time. It's often the nature of the industry, and we're looking to find ways to help people through that. We have certainly been on a path of change really in forestry not just in Nova Scotia, but across Canada for many years. Many of you are aware of the work we have been doing through Professor Lahey's report on forest practices, moving towards ecological forestry. I'm sure you'll have some questions around that.

One of the other areas that I have been working on is not only the forest practices, but also the products and the processes that we have in forestry and what the opportunities are. We started some of this work after some of the upheaval in 2011 and 2012. I'm the Chair of the innovation hub. We're looking for future opportunities as well. There's a lot of projects. I would be happy to speak to any of those today as well.

THE CHAIR: We will do rounds of questioning. We will start with the PC caucus. Mr. Houston.

TIM HOUSTON: Good morning. I appreciate your appearing here. I have to say that I was a little surprised when the transition team was first announced. With all respect, I thought maybe the Deputy Minister of Business or Lands and Forestry might be leading the transition team.

I'm interested in the initial Plan B and the initial Plan B team that the Premier had referred to at previous times in the past. In an interview with CBC on February 22nd - and I'll table a transcript of it - the Premier was asked about the very situation that we find ourselves in today. It was with respect to a Plan B. I want to read the Premier's comments from that. The Premier said on February 22nd:

"We currently have a committee internally right now looking at all of the possible options if the Mill closes.

What do we do with saw mills in terms of excess chips and residual matter that has now become part of the business model.

What are potential retraining programs that are available.

We will then, in very short order, be going external, out to our partners in the saw mill industry looking at other partners in the labour industry to see the art of the possible for providing options in that community.

We are gathering that information right now. We will continue making sure we have that information internally and then go out to our partners in the community in the not too distant future.”

That was a year ago, as we know.

[10:15 a.m.]

Back in February of last year, there was a team of deputy ministers and staff from the Premier’s Office working towards a transition, working towards a Plan B. We don’t know the makeup of that team.

On March 13, 2019, the Minister of Business in the Legislature listed off a number of members of that team that was working at that time, a bunch of deputy ministers. He referred to a task force of the best people that the government has and the best decision makers. He didn’t list you on that list, so I don’t know if you were part of the Plan B team at that time.

Assuming that this Plan B team was acting as the Premier indicated and as the minister had indicated in the Legislature, I wonder if you can provide to this committee a detailed assessment of what that committee did and the information that they have shared with you. If you can provide that or indicate whether you were starting from scratch on January 3rd, that would be helpful.

THE CHAIR: Can you table that document, please?

TIM HOUSTON: Sure.

KELLIANN DEAN: I’m sure it wouldn’t come as a surprise to anybody around this table that as deputies, we collaborate on a regular basis. We come together often on issues that are before us or issues that we’re anticipating and, of course, Northern Pulp would have been one of those issues that people would have been working on and looking for solutions and opportunities. Of course, we share information and we discuss how we would move forward.

The information and the ideas that had been discussed, I have had access to my colleagues to have further discussions, and the rationale for my leadership on this committee has much to do with the fact that we're looking forward, not behind. We're looking ahead to see where opportunities might be, where export opportunities are, how we can support the forestry sector in looking to diversify, to look for new markets, and to find new opportunities and not jeopardize the U.S. softwood lumber exclusion that we worked so hard to achieve.

The trade lens is an important part of all of the work that we're going to be doing moving forward. All of the colleagues that I have access to have expertise in this area, and we are bringing it to the table as we look at possibilities going forward.

TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for that. I was curious as to whether your committee was starting from scratch, because I was trying to reconcile the Premier's various statements on this; they've basically been at odds. In February, he was on CBC saying he had a committee working on this.

He wrote to me on January 22nd in response to a letter that I wrote him. In his response on January 22nd, he encouraged me to stop writing and stop asking questions, and in that letter, he said very specifically:

"I appreciate your concern and interest, but a letter campaign in these early days of the transition team's work is not helpful. It was, at best, premature to expect detailed answers from the team when members from the forestry sector . . . had not even had their first meeting."

I was trying to reconcile the Premier a year ago saying: we got this, we have a committee of people - the brightest minds in government - working on this. Then a year later saying: hey, give us some time, we're starting from scratch. I couldn't reconcile which one of those statements was most truthful. What I'm hearing from you is that your committee was indeed starting from scratch, but I just want to make sure that I'm hearing you correctly.

I'll ask you very specifically: The committee that the Premier indicated started a year ago of deputies and people within government - the committee that the Premier's comments on CBC could be taken to mean people were actually working on this, trying to come up with ideas and solutions - did that committee produce anything by way of minutes or anything in the way of written ideas or anything that you can share with us, or was that a committee that really didn't produce anything and the Premier's most recent statement of last week was more accurate in that you're starting from scratch? Is it starting from scratch, or was it a year's worth of work by the brightest minds in the government?

KELLIANN DEAN: Again, I would say that the committee had information, and we have expertise around the table that had worked previously and identified opportunities and had done assessment and analysis. I would say that we work no differently on this than we have on some other issues that come up that we all work collaboratively on.

With respect to specific questions, you'll have to address those with the Premier. What I can say is that you have also written directly to me to ask for clarification on certain items, and I've provided those responses back to you. Some of your questioning around the very specific aspects of the fund is information that we would not have had in any previous deliberations or discussions around Northern Pulp. Details around how the fund would be allocated and what it would be used for would have been information that we would not have had details on, because we hadn't started to have those conversations yet.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the NDP caucus. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I'm going to direct my questions more so to Ms. Towers. One of the questions that I'm hearing from various contacts in the forestry sector around the province is about the land that Northern Pulp actually owns or manages. Some of that land was purchased in not too distant times with support from the taxpayers of Nova Scotia as part of support at another point in time: 475,000 acres.

I think people are interested in that land because they're concerned about how that land will be managed going into the future, given that we are at this point of transition in the forestry sector where we've committed to more ecological forestry. That's a lot of land that has been managed primarily for pulp, which has not necessarily been in line with Lahey's recommendations. Also, I think that land represents the landscape on which the forestry sector can continue to work.

If it has been managed for Northern Pulp and now Northern Pulp is not operating and coordinating harvests on that land, will other players in Nova Scotia that are looking for those new markets, those new opportunities, have access? Who is basically managing it? I would appreciate whatever light you can shed on that situation?

JULIE TOWERS: There's quite a lot of tangle, and there is often a lot of - I would say sometimes that information isn't always out there for people to understand the difference in terms of where wood comes from and who manages it, so it's very much to your question.

I'll chunk it up. Many people know that we have 5.5 million hectares in the province. Roughly half is what we call small private, so less than 20,000 hectares. Then we have larger private. There's almost two categories of private that we deal with, and we'll talk about that in the programs. There's the industrial private, sometimes called freehold, that typically forestry companies owned. You'll hear that terminology.

When we speak about Northern Pulp or Northern Timber, which is the company that owns the land, some of you may remember, particularly those from Pictou County, the different owners of the mill in Pictou that owned it at different times: Neenah, Blue Wolf, Northern Timber, and Paper Excellence. They split it in half, roughly about 500,000 acres, so there's that land that's held by Northern Timber and half went to Wagner, who has since sold off a number of chunks to various owners. I'm not trying to make this complicated, but it's interesting. If you don't understand the ownership, you don't understand the wood flow, because it comes from those different sources.

The loan that you're talking about, the \$75 million for that 475,000 acres, is backstopped so that if any time that loan wasn't paid, that land reverts back to the province, so the security is there.

Northern Pulp is a company managed to move wood from small private from their freehold - and this is the really important part - and there is the Scott Maritimes Limited Agreement Act that has been in place since the 1960s. Under that Act, it's not land; it's volume. Under the Act, they have access to 100,000 tons of fibre. Traditionally, that has been roughly 85 per cent softwood and 15 per cent hardwood.

Of the wood coming from all those sources, when it gets cut, there are different parts of the tree. It always goes to the best value. It's the nature of business. They're always going to look at where the best profit is. If it's large enough and the right quality, it's going to go to sawmills and become sawlogs or stud wood, construction two-by-fours, et cetera. Then the other parts that get shaved off, the bark can go various ways. It may get burned for energy; sometimes it's part of their own energy source right at a mill site. There could be shavings that could go to farmers. It can go for stuffing pet beds. There's all kinds of residual uses there. Then roughly a third of it is pulpwood, which is the product that would go to a pulp and paper mill: the former Bowater Mersey, Northern Pulp, Port Hawkesbury Paper, and Minas Basin Pulp and Paper when it was in play.

You have different pieces going different places. It's a long way around - you have to understand - to come back to in terms of who has access. The provincial Crown lands in the central region on which Northern Pulp and its predecessors operated, for volume, is still provincial Crown land. They still have rights under that Act to access volume, even if they're not operating the mill. What we're in discussions with them about is ways to manage that volume to still flow it within the system so sawmills are still getting it, a hardboard mill is still getting it. Remember, all these companies exchange. It's a constant exchange of the different products. They do fibre exchanges. That will continue, but it will absolutely be under all the practices that we require on Crown land. That was a long-winded way, hopefully, to answer your question.

LISA ROBERTS: I appreciate that, and I also appreciate how complex it is and how incredibly interlocked at many different points, these different players in the forestry sector are. That said, I'm interested if you can shed any light on what the options are that you're looking at for that management. Okay, this block, we're going to apply for a cut.

Who is going to pay the contractor? If effectively the mill is shut down, it doesn't need its 30 per cent. I don't understand what the incentive would be for the mill to be playing that managerial role of figuring out what needs to go into that very complicated system where wood gets processed and sorted. What are the options that you're considering?

JULIE TOWERS: There's a range of choices. Remember, Northern Pulp may not be operating the pulp mill and producing pulp, but it still exists as a company. It still has qualified people in their woodlands section who are planners, foresters, forest technicians, GIS, et cetera. There are already sites out there that have been approved for harvesting that can be reassigned, so the same contractors who might have worked for Northern Pulp can do the wood directly for an Elmsdale Lumber or a Ledwidge Lumber.

Most contractors and their crews aren't employees of Northern Pulp, so they can work. It doesn't matter which mill is going to use the product. It can be either managed through Northern Pulp or directly through another Crown licensee - either the existing ones, which include Taylor Lumber and Great Northern Timber, but any of the other companies can also be Crown licensees and assigned a licence under ministerial authority. It can be managed through Northern but directed to sawmills and other mills, or it can be directly assigned to another company. It would be the same contractors and crews. It's kind of whether they're contracted or subcontracted. It would still be employing them, and that's the key part that we look for.

THE CHAIR: We'll move it over to the Liberal caucus. Mr. MacLellan.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thanks for being here today for an important conversation for the province in many regards. Any time we can share information and disseminate the facts, it's good. Thanks for being here and for your continued work on the transition team.

[10:30 a.m.]

Since Mr. Houston referenced me, I just want to provide a little clarification. I don't know if you have to table things here, but the list I provided, at that point, there wouldn't have been a transition team. I don't know if it was a list of deputies that I deal with or I'm not sure how that is applicable.

I've got a terrible memory, so I could have said something to that effect around deputies overall, but I can tell you that if I was making a list and identifying competent deputy ministers, Kelliann Dean would be at the top of my list. I know that, for the record, if we were identifying people who could be part of this, Deputy Minister Dean would be someone I would lean on, and have leaned on, and have had a long relationship with in my 10 years as Opposition and certainly as government.

For our other two deputies, as well: having the opportunity to see what you do on a daily basis not only around the transition and respectively in Lands and Forestry and at LAE, is critical work, and it is exemplary service. Again, not that anyone's diminishing your role, but I just want to say that it's critical, and this isn't light and fluffy stuff; this is a heavy-hitting topic and content that you're dealing with. I think you're doing great work. With respect, whether or not the Deputy Minister of Business is at the table, I feel that I'm very well represented as a Nova Scotian and from a government perspective and as an MLA. I'm very happy with the work you're doing and continue to do that.

Deputy Minister Towers, this one's probably for you. You referenced a lot of the stuff - and I'll be the first one to admit I don't understand a lot of the details you just shared for Lisa - but with respect to the Lahey report, the ecological forestry, those things: Can you sort of bridge the gap as it relates to the industry's new markets? When you're looking at what's there and existing practices and what's recommended, how do we make that jump to finding those new unexplored markets?

We have a significant wood products footprint from a trade perspective and for new markets, but how do we identify the work that's been done in understanding what we have to do to move forward with finding new customers for that product?

JULIE TOWERS: Maybe I'll start, and Deputy Dean can add in, as well, on some of the markets. It's a global marketplace that forestry deals with; it's a global industry. It's products and it's processes so we have, and have had, many different products that have been produced in Nova Scotia for many years and will continue to be. There are also new ones that are evolving and ecological forestry ties into that very much because it's about having the diversity in your forest of species and sizes and what kinds of products can come from them. It just gives you more choices.

Many people know the typical products that have been produced for many years: pulp, paper, lumber. There's hardboard; many know the Louisiana-Pacific mill down in the Chester area for example, that does things like the skins that go on doors and stuff like that, and they use hardwood. We use both hardwood and softwood.

What we're starting to see besides those traditional products that will continue is we're getting things, and many of you would have seen them or used them in your own home; wood pellets is a huge area. The fibre bricks that people use because people don't like messy fireplaces are great products, and Lewis Mouldings is really ramping up the number of those. It's a huge market. One of the things that's very much evolving is how you produce energy, and because wood is a renewable resource, the demand is huge globally. That's only going to keep going up.

The other ones that are really starting to come out - we are doing a lot of work through the innovation hub and with our partners - is you're starting to get into biofuels such as biodiesel that can be used in automobiles, marine environment, and for industrial uses. Remember, energy can be things such as electricity, but it can be heat. There are by-

products that come off. They're really getting to the point that they can take products that traditionally use a petroleum-based product and use something that comes from plant fibre, whether it's agriculture or forestry, because you're breaking it down to the carbon level so that over time you'll see that with most of our products.

We're looking at things like how you can use plant fibre that comes from wood into things such as food, both for livestock and aquaculture feed. There are some human supplements that you can use that fiber in. You can replace petroleum products like in tires.

There's a huge range. Some of it is at the level of what can be used in paints or cosmetics. It's rapidly evolving, and it's a really exciting area that we're looking at. Hopefully that helps.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thanks for that. I think that's helpful to understand because those many folks who are focused and transfixed on how we get to the new reality around forestry and those new markets have to understand what kind of context we're talking in terms of those new options, products, and the like.

I think probably Deputy Minister Dean would be good to address my next topic, but maybe all three of you want to jump in. It's around the complexities of trade compliance. I think in all the literature that you see and the stories around any support that the transition team could give to the sector - so this is specific to the transition team - there's always the lens of trade compliance.

My first touch point with the forestry sector was around the softwood lumber dispute, and the fact that we have the exclusion - we're one of the few provinces that do - is largely through the work of the sector. It wasn't government, politics, or back and forth meetings in Washington. It was the practices that our forestry sector decided to follow that got us that exclusion.

I've heard it from their own lips in Washington that we're the gold standard in terms of fair trade and free trade around the forestry sector and obviously, specifically, the softwood lumber. We can't jeopardize that and any other thing that we do in terms of any of the supports, so all the aspects of the transition team that you're looking at for supports have to fit in the trade compliance. We cannot break these rules.

When you're having these discussions - with Jeff Bishop, for example, and those who are at the table - what's the approach, the methodology, to ensure? Does that run back through IGA? Obviously, Jeff and his people would have a very good understanding of the trade compliance. What are the lenses and the focal points around trade compliance that we can ensure that before we ever advance a support program for the sector that it's 100 per cent trade compliant?

KELLIANN DEAN: Ensuring that we protect the exclusion that we have with the softwood lumber agreement is critical in everything that we do. It's something that the sawmill owners feel is also very important because the consequences of not doing that mean that in the future, we could be subject to countervailing duties. Margins are already very slim in the sector, so export wouldn't be economically feasible for them.

You're absolutely right; the fact that we have a softwood lumber exclusion was the result of a lot of hard work with the sector, as well as the fact that we have a market-based stumpage system. It really comes back to that.

As we go forward, we have to ensure that any support we provide - and we know that there are opportunities to help workers in the sector - has to be viewed through a trade lens to avoid a future challenge and future risk to that exclusion. What I mean by that is you can't provide a direct subsidy to a business, to a sawmill, or to somebody that is directly connected. If we do that, then that raises risk.

As we look at the kind of support we can provide, we're trying to help workers. We're trying to support training. We're providing support to contractors. These are things, as we view through a trade lens, that would not be considered direct subsidy to the sector or to sawmills. We're consulting regularly with the lawyers who had worked with us on the softwood lumber exclusion to make sure that some of these programs and some of the support that we do provide would not be viewed as enhancing our trade risk.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the PC caucus. Mr. Houston.

TIM HOUSTON: As we're hearing, this is complicated. This is a big task. This is the exact reason that a year ago, as an Opposition Party, we were encouraging the government to get to work on thinking of what's possible. We took the Premier and comments that we heard in the Legislature at face value, that there was work being done. I think what we're finding out now and have found out in the last few weeks is not a lot, if any, work was really done.

I do think that's important, because we have to learn from mistakes and go forward. I heard Deputy Dean say that the plan is to keep people working. Already that plan is failing. People are losing their jobs right now, so we want to make sure that there is a plan. A transition team for the forestry sector, had it been established a year ago, there might have been a smoother transition. It might have been able to work with people at Northern Pulp or people in the industry and say, this is what may happen, and this is how we can transition, but we haven't seen a transition plan. What we're seeing is a kind of pick-up-the-pieces plan. It's a big task before you.

We have a situation where we possibly had two committees. Maybe the committee existed before; maybe it didn't exist. As I say, I haven't seen evidence of its existence, other than the Premier's comments that it existed, but we know we have an industry that has a lot of questions and very few answers about where this is all going to go. We know

we have a government that was very unprepared for something that was always a possibility that is adding a lot of anxiety and stress to a lot of different families.

I do want to make one more attempt to clarify what has happened for the past year. I'd be very interested to know if the previous transition team had terms of reference and if you've seen those terms of reference, and are they the same as the terms of reference of your committee?

KELLIANN DEAN: I think what I would say is that at this point, I have said that we've shared information, and we work collaboratively. I think the proof is actually in the actions that we've taken since we have been formed.

There has been a significant amount of work that has gone on in order to move the sector forward. A lot of the work that we're doing - and as Julie said, this is a sector that has been in transition for a period of time. It's a sector that had a major customer and was able to sell to a major customer for a period of time. Now that the business doesn't have one major customer, it has to make a change. Any business that's focused on one customer has to think about diversification, because it creates risk.

In moving forward, there are companies within the sector that would have been thinking about the possibility, and we as government employees and colleagues have been thinking about the possibility. Now some of the things that you're seeing in place are based on our understanding of impacts and how not having Northern Pulp would filter throughout the sector and affect the integrated supply and the integrated nature of those relationships.

In terms of keeping people working, there are people in the sector who are still working. I've been impressed actually by the resilience of businesses and their ability to find alternate markets and to do things that continue to keep their employees working. There are some who are having a difficult time, and we are hearing through the 1-800 line and through our other accesses that people are looking for work.

I'm going to let Ava speak a little bit to this work. The outreach sessions we have done, the people we've talked to, and the people who have come forward, some of them want to stay in Nova Scotia, they want to work, and they're looking at other opportunities if they don't want to stay in the forestry sector. That's a priority area of ours: to make sure that those who want to find work can find it, and we can connect them to other opportunities.

[10:45 a.m.]

AVA CZAPALAY: My interest is in Nova Scotians and helping Nova Scotians stay in Nova Scotia, working in Nova Scotia communities. What I've seen in Labour and Advanced Education over the years is that often we have the workers and we have the jobs, but the two don't always match in terms of skill sets.

For example, my team put together a list of the capital projects coming up in 2020. There are 204 capital projects, private and public, in Nova Scotia. There's a huge demand for labourers and tradespeople. Do we have the match there? If people say there aren't jobs in Nova Scotia, that's not quite correct. There are jobs in rural Nova Scotia, as well, throughout the province. It's matching the people to the jobs and ensuring they have the skill set to do a new job.

We met with Northern Pulp employees, over 225 employees, on January 6th. At that session, many of the employees came forward and said, look, I'm a power engineer, but I feel that with a small bit of upgrading, I could be a plumber, or I could be an electrician. One guy had been driving a boom truck, and he said, I would like to work on something down in the port or something. People came forward and said, I have these skills, but I don't know how to translate them into a new opportunity.

That's what made us think that we should offer a customized approach through the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and the Nova Scotia Community College that takes a person from where they are right now, with their current skill set, to a new job and a new opportunity by accelerating that process for them. We have 52 Nova Scotia Works offices throughout Nova Scotia, many small communities throughout the province. The best thing workers can do is go to their Nova Scotia Works office and register. That gets them into the system, and people are there to help them with every step of their journey, from the point where they identify that they want to retrain, to getting the retraining.

TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for that information. It is important. Some percentage of the people may transition to a new career, but when I heard the comment that the plan was to keep people working, I guess I assumed that it was to keep people working in the forestry industry. I didn't realize that a main function of the transition team is to transition people out of the forestry industry. Right now, I still want to focus on the transition for the forestry industry. I think that's what's important.

I will go back one more time to the Premier's comments a year ago, on February 22, 2019. The Premier was very clear: "We currently have a committee internally right now looking at all of the possible options if the Mill closes." My focus is on the next thing: "What do we do with saw mills in terms of excess chips and residual matter that has now become part of the business model." This is a question the Premier posed a year ago, and he indicated that he had an internal committee working on that question.

My question for you is: Can you provide anything to this committee in terms of minutes of what was discussed of where that's going? Or is it actually the case that that didn't go anywhere for an entire year, and it's just starting right now that we're trying to figure that out? I believe if the work would have started in earnest a year ago, we would be further along with the transition plan and not starting from scratch after the fact. I think that obviously puts your committee in a difficult position.

Maybe we can just kind of close the loop on this one. Did you get anything from that committee in terms of writing that you're willing to share with Nova Scotians?

KELLIANN DEAN: I have Julie Towers on the committee who was on a previous committee, and Julie can share information.

TIM HOUSTON: Can Ms. Towers share any work of the previous committee?

KELLIANN DEAN: Mr. Houston, to think that we as deputy ministers wouldn't share information or discuss work that had happened in the past or ideas that had come up or were shared or discussed - of course we do, because that is a starting point. We aren't starting from scratch here. We have people experienced in the sector who are talking to us, and I can turn it over to Julie to add some comments as well. We understand the impact that this decision has and the need to address the challenges that are ensuing in this sector. Of course, drawing on resources throughout government is how we design and move forward, so we're not starting from scratch.

I would say that the actions we have taken, the programming that has come forward to date, is all based on an understanding of the sector, how it works, what the needs are, and how it reacts under pressure or under stress, which we're seeing with the loss of a major customer in the chain. I think I would leave it there.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the NDP caucus. Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The current situation obviously harkens back to previous closures. One of the things we've been looking at a fair amount is the closure of the Bowater Mersey mill, which happened under the NDP Government. What we saw was a community-based transition team, which is quite different than this forestry transition team. Based on the conversations we've had with folks that were involved at the time, the idea of that was really bringing in representation from the impacted communities, like looking at those specific areas that were impacted and allowing the people involved to act as advocates for their own community.

The reality with the current transition team is that it's mostly deputies. Obviously, you guys have a lot of expertise, but also because you all report to the Premier, we end up in a version of Question Period when we talk about it and it's "he said, he said," even though you're all women. (Laughter) This is where we end up when we're trying to talk about things, so this is why we see so much value when we come to these kinds of major crossroads and transitions in a community-based approach and ideally an independent community-based approach.

I want to clarify that I'm not saying any of you are political operatives; I'm just saying it's by nature of the reporting structure.

I guess what I'm asking is: Is the transition team actually actively meeting with community members? Do you have really strong representation? Will you bring some of them onto that transition team so that it can look and feel more like a solution that's at least partially arrived at by the folks facing the challenges? Have you considered an independent chair?

KELLIANN DEAN: Thank you for that. I assure you that we are hearing voices from the community, and we do have representation from outside of government, as you know. Don Bureaux is bringing a really strong voice around training needs and adaptation and how we may move forward in the future.

We have Greg Watson who is in the business. He's very involved in the community and bringing information to us on a regular basis around what he's hearing. He's going to community meetings. He was at the Cumberland transition team meeting, because that community has come together on their own to look for proactive ways and ideas. They have provided those to us, and interestingly, some of the ideas they have are things that we actually acted on. The idea to provide relief to contractors was one example of something that came from that group.

We've met with industry representation as well. Jeff Bishop, who is the Executive Director for Forest Nova Scotia, is on the team. He brings a variety of perspectives from his membership, who we actually went and met with immediately in the very early days. We have Debbie Reeves who is, as I said, a representative of woodlot owners, and she has a wealth of experience and contacts in that sector. She is in New Ross; Greg is in Tatamagouche. Then we also have Doug Ledwidge, who is bringing a wealth of experience in the business and also the sawmill expertise. They are hearing from their colleagues from the sector. They are bringing that information to us.

In addition, we've received calls. People have reached out to us. We've met with people individually, and we are open to receiving ideas and feedback. A lot of it has come to the transition table; we discussed it and decided which things we can actually work with and move on. Ava has been in community with people listening to them, providing advice and support from a training and support perspective, but also hearing ideas. We definitely are hearing from people, and we are making an effort to go to the AGM as well. Also, wherever we can go into community, we will.

I appreciate the concern that perhaps there aren't enough voices on the transition team, and where we can, we will bring people in to meet with us to provide expertise that we don't have in areas that we may be looking to learn more about. Everything we do has to be co-created with the sector, and I think at times it might seem uncomfortable that we're not immediately following a plan that is prescriptive. We have input. We have ideas, and we're trying to determine which ones will have the greatest impact while respecting our

softwood lumber exclusion and our trade risk. Julie, I'm not sure if you want to talk, or Ava. (Interruption)

That's right. We've heard from the chamber of commerce and from the Federation of Municipalities, who Julie and I are going to meet with on Friday of this week. Although those people may not all be sitting here, we are acutely aware of their concerns and eager to hear what they have to say and any input that they want to provide.

JULIE TOWERS: I'll give you a simple example. Through the toll-free line alone, we've had over 430 calls. Our staff at the department, or staff through Labour and Advanced Education, have spoken to all those folks. Some of them are repeat callers.

Kelliann mentioned a lot of the ways we've been interacting, and remember, this is what we do. We're departments that are distributed regionally in local offices; our local staff knows these folks. They talk to them all the time. I couldn't even tell you how many conversations I've had.

To your point about Bowater and some of the opportunities, I see there's even more opportunity, and that's certainly what happened in Queens and Lunenburg after Bowater. It was talking about where they were going as communities broadly, not just in forestry, over the long term, and we've certainly had the immediate short-term focus, but moving into the medium- and long-term focus. That's where I think communities are part of that, so we'll build on it.

THE CHAIR: I was going to say I probably sent many of those to your hotline.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I appreciate that answer, and I have no doubt that you guys are engaging as you can, but with respect, the other folks on the team are industry, so we have industry and government. As far as I can tell, we don't have someone who has a community hat on that team. Feedback is great, but it's different than decision making.

I sit on the Law Amendments Committee. We get a lot of feedback, but it almost never translates into a different decision. The point I'm trying to make is: Who's in charge of the decisions? Again, not impugning any of the work that you guys are doing, but I think you can only have a better outcome because, as Ms. Towers said, those questions are about where those communities want to be in 10, 20, 50, 100 years.

I think this is an opportunity for those conversations to happen and hopefully to happen in a really innovative and creative way. I know, obviously, the MLAs for the area have been talking about this and talking with their constituents. It just seems like it would be such a shame if that opportunity was missed.

With that in mind, how do we measure the results of this transition team? Is it measured by the industry? Is it measured by outputs? Is it measured by employment numbers? Is there going to be a report that comes out in a year or two that talks about the work of the committee and whether or not it did what it set out to do?

[11:00 a.m.]

KELLIANN DEAN: There are a number of ways that we can measure results. I think primarily it will be if we can ensure that we have a strong, sustainable forestry sector in the future. A lot of that has to do with how the Lahey report is going to be implemented, the ability for us to find new markets, to add value to the products that we have, to ensure that people are working in the sector, and that it continues to employ people. I know that's not actual numbers and a hard-core result, but that is the ultimate goal of the work that we're doing. As you move forward, you can look at that in terms of diversification of export markets, exports, what we're doing.

I appreciate the community side of what you're saying because I know that as an example, the regional enterprise networks - the RENs - really want to become involved in working with communities and finding what other opportunities there may be in driving entrepreneurship, in looking for other ways for communities themselves to diversify so that they may not always be as dependent on the forestry sector. They may look for other opportunities as well. A lot of that comes from the community itself, and certain communities have already come together to look at what those opportunities might look like. Julie, you can add to this in terms of the forestry goals and objectives.

If we can say that we still have a strong sector for forestry in this province, and we are adding value to our forests and keeping them healthy but also creating export value and keeping people working in the sector so that it is a strong sector, I think that's the goal that we're aiming for - and in the process, to keep as many people employed as we can, whether they are employed in the forestry sector or whether they choose to transition to something else.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Irving, for the Liberal caucus.

KEITH IRVING: Thank you all for being here. I do think it's important, just based on some comments from across the table, that Nova Scotians understand our deputy ministers are politically agnostic. You serve the people of Nova Scotia. My wife was a deputy minister; she served everyone.

I have just one comment to preface my two questions here. In my conversations with constituents of mine who work in the industry, I have been struck by their willingness to look forward and not backward. They accepted the decision of Northern Pulp on balance, and we're focused on the future here. I don't think they're concerned about what the minutes were from a committee a year ago; they're focused on going forward.

Unfortunately, we're here as MLAs, and I have quickly learned at the provincial level in Party politics that we have a propensity to be political. I think what I was hearing from my constituents was that this was not a political issue. This is a very, very important issue that needs all Nova Scotians to be pulling together to help with this transition.

I think everyone at this table wants to contribute and help to find solutions here, to do what we can as MLAs in our roles as community leaders and as eyes and ears on the ground. What can we do as MLAs that will actually help your work?

KELLIANN DEAN: I think to continue to provide us with feedback, because you're hearing from people on the ground. You're hearing what their major concerns are, so it's helpful for us to hear that. We welcome that feedback.

I think the other thing that might be helpful - and I actually have something here that I will share with everybody and make sure that all MLAs receive a copy of this - is an update on the work of the transition team and areas of support that are available. I know that you often get a lot of questions in your offices, so hopefully something like this would be helpful for you to respond to some of the questions that you might receive from people looking for help, looking for assistance, wondering what might be available, wondering where to go. Everything that has been done to date is summarized here.

Also, there is a website that people can access that is updated on a regular basis that has information on it with respect to programs and areas of support for them. Ensuring that information is shared would be very helpful to the transition team's efforts. This is very much a two-way process. We want to hear, we need to hear, and we like to think that we're being responsive to the greatest needs that we are hearing about as we move forward.

I would also agree with you that a lot of what we are hearing from people is related to how we move forward. It's related to - where do we look for new opportunities? Where are the new markets? How do we find those markets and how do we position ourselves to take advantage of these opportunities going forward? That is very much the work that this team has been set up to do, so continuing to share that information with us from your constituents and to share this would be very helpful.

THE CHAIR: Can you table that?

KELLIANN DEAN: I can absolutely do that.

KEITH IRVING: My other question goes to the feelings that the people in the sector are feeling: the stress on families, the lack of clarity. These are people dedicated to their work in the forest; Ms. Towers talks about her 33 years working. These are sometimes intergenerational businesses. These are business people who have put everything on the line and taken out big loans, not only to feed their family, but to contribute to the Nova Scotian rural economy.

I think we all have to be very sensitive to those very personal stories and even just the mental health of people. It just popped into my head moments ago - Holly Carr just did an exhibit at the Museum of Natural History. She is putting on a show in Wolfville in June called *The Light in The Forest*. It was about mental health and that there's always light at the end of a dark forest.

I'm just wondering if you could kind of use this opportunity to talk to the forest industry workers to give them a sense of how hard you're working on this and how Nova Scotians are pulling behind them to help them get through this dark place in the forest to the light. I think that's important.

You're working hard, I'm sure hours and hours, meetings, and putting forward ideas and working through all this, but the pieces of information are going to come out in bits and pieces. Just relay to forestry workers and the communities and families around them about all the work that's going on.

KELLIANN DEAN: I guess I would say that no matter how hard we're working, we have a genuine concern and a deep appreciation for how difficult it is for these families, the workers, the people in the sector. I think each and every one of us is committed to trying to make a difference to help and to move things forward and to put the supports in place to help people get through this difficult time.

We've heard a lot of stories from people, from individuals, and we've all spoken to them. We recognize that this is a period of intense uncertainty for people, and that creates a lot of stress in their lives. I guess I would say, yes, we're working hard, but that in no way makes up for the stress that people are feeling right now. We appreciate that, and we understand that.

We hope that the supports we've put in place are making a difference and can help them get through. I think the emotional support line that was set up, we have had some feedback that it is being utilized and is quite helpful for people. They are, I think, experiencing enormous stress as they think about what the future looks like and how they're going to move forward. We hope that we're able to make a difference and to provide some assurance that there's a path forward, but we know that it is very difficult for the workers and for the families.

Ava, did you want to comment on some of your work there?

AVA CZAPALAY: I did want to comment on that particular point, because the 1-888 number that we set up on December 23rd comes into Labour and Advanced Education. It's the Labour Standards phone number, but the people who answer that phone are trained to handle difficult situations. They have the personality and the expertise and the history of taking difficult phone calls. That's why we chose that toll-free number so when people call, it's not just a quick call asking what resource is available or where can I go. They want to take some time to talk about their own personal situation. We're getting a good

sense from the folks who answer that phone how people are feeling throughout Nova Scotia.

One of the best resources that we have at our fingertips are the Nova Scotia Works offices because they're in communities. People don't have to travel very far to get to a Nova Scotia Works office and sit down with a person and have a conversation. I was just at the Nova Scotia Works office in New Glasgow on January 31st, and they have about 10 or 11 employees - quite a number of employees. It's a very welcoming centre in the middle of town.

They were talking about people who were coming in who had just been laid off, feeling quite angry and stressed by their situation, but leaving with a resumé in hand, with a plan in place about what certificates they need to update, knowing that they can access that free training and focus on other opportunities. While I was there, there was also an employer from the local community meeting with people to talk about the work that his company had available and the employees that he needed.

I feel that once people can take a little bit of control themselves and control their destiny in a certain way, it does help the situation on a personal level.

KELLIANN DEAN: I did want to add something. In terms of how MLAs could help, it would also be to encourage individuals and businesses to register with the Nova Scotia Works offices, because if they do that, then we can start to make the connections between businesses that are looking for people and the potential employees who are looking for work, because there is some matchmaking that can happen there. That would be an important point of referral if people could do that.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the PC caucus - Mr. Rushton, for your first question.

TORY RUSHTON: Thank you for being here this morning. I appreciate the hard venture that you guys have been up against for the last few weeks and the next few months to come.

I appreciate the recognition that you stated that industry has been resilient in this whole matter and looking to the future. I've certainly heard from many of the people who are reaching out to you. As critic for the PC caucus, I've certainly heard from many who are reaching out to you and probably a few more who haven't been in contact yet. We're certainly hearing the impacts on life already with machines lost and not knowing where the next paycheque is going to come from.

Something I've heard province-wide in the sector is an idea that was thrown to you - I know it was thrown to government, to the transition team. Actually, on January 23rd, we wrote the Minister of Energy and Mines and the Minister of Lands and Forestry. I'm sure, Ms. Towers, you're aware of it. It was basically asking for an understanding of the impact

of a must-run situation for Brooklyn Energy and Port Hawkesbury. We're not asking for full-harvest trees to be going into biomass. We're hearing from the sector that they are making plans for the future, 18 months down the road. For the short term, they need a place to put their market product to help them get over that hurdle.

[11:15 a.m.]

We're talking about residue from mills. We're not talking about cutting trees down for bio product. No one is interested in seeing Nova Scotia Power rates go up. That's a known fact in Nova Scotia. But before it ever came from the transition team and before many got to the transition committee, the Premier stated on January 29th - and I'll table those letters - that must-run was not going to happen.

I'm curious from the transition point of view: Where did the basis of that analysis come from? If you have that, could you table that, please?

KELLIANN DEAN: I know what you're speaking about is the need to find a home for wood chips, which is primary residue, in the short term. In terms of must-run status - I'll just back up. Increasing the capacity of the biomass plants to take more chips obviously is a private sector decision. Must-run status was removed as part of the electricity policy. The Premier did say that that wouldn't be reinstated.

The other thing to remember in terms of imposing conditions on business that could be seen to be subsidizing the private sector or the sawmill operators is the fact that, again, it puts our exclusion at risk and could create trade risk for us. Interfering in market pricing or interfering in that area creates trade risk for us.

What I will say, though, is that private-sector-led opportunities to use more chips would be welcome in the sector. I do believe that Nova Scotia Power has looked at the opportunity to use more chips in the Point Tupper plant. Those contracts and those negotiations can happen between the business operators and Nova Scotia Power. If that results in utilizing more of the chips in the short to medium term, that would definitely provide a good solution for some of the sawmill operators.

TORY RUSHTON: I appreciate that. I guess the sector - and myself, too, not being an expert in that whole aspect - doesn't really understand if we're already using that product to produce some power. They're asking for Nova Scotia Power to purchase more chips in the short term, produce maybe 80 per cent as even a top from the sector, rather than a must-run situation. The Premier stated that the Nova Scotia Power bills would increase. Has there been an analysis to determine exactly how much those bills would increase, or would they increase at all?

KELLIANN DEAN: I think you would have to ask Nova Scotia Power about rates and how it purchases fuel and what that means in terms of rates. There are regulations that ensure ratepayer stability, and that is how Nova Scotia Power operates. If you have a specific question about that, I would go directly to Nova Scotia Power.

What I will say, though, is that the opportunity to increase the usage of biomass at the Point Tupper plant would be welcomed by industry, I would imagine, and that could be an option for some operators.

THE CHAIR: We will turn it over to the NDP caucus. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: As we discuss the sector and also discuss the future of forestry and follow-through with the Lahey report, I don't want to - and I don't think any of us should - fall into feeling like there's a dichotomy of sustainability and ecological forestry and economic viability. In fact, that was very much the point that Professor Lahey made right in the introduction to his report, that in fact, the long-term financial viability of the forestry sector depends entirely on the sustainability and the continued vibrance of our forests.

Related to that, there are some high-value, relatively low-volume forestry industry activities, businesses operating now and that have been operating, where the primary constraint has actually been lack of access to hardwood.

I'm thinking of Group Savoie, for example, which is right in Pictou and employs approximately 50 people, and their challenge has been that they're a small player in a province where the dominant industry has not been oriented to their business. Even though on Crown land, and we should be seeing 15 to 20 per cent hardwoods, they're not getting 15 to 20 per cent of hardwood when Crown land is cut.

I'm kind of going back a bit to that question of access to Crown land and who's going to be managing Crown land, given that there are businesses that could be ramping up, could be employing more people for more weeks of the year, and could be innovating without having to develop entirely new markets. They have markets. Their constraint is access to the wood. It's a happy coincidence that the kind of forestry that leads to them having access to the kind of wood that they need is actually in line, as I understand it, with ecological forestry.

Is there a path to implementation of Lahey that prioritizes Crown land management access for those sorts of employers and industrial activities that require robust mixed-use forestry, particularly for Savoie?

JULIE TOWERS: I can speak to Group Savoie specifically, but more generally about hardwood as well. Remember I said earlier that one of the aspects behind ecological forestry is just that: the range of species and types and sizes out there in the forest allow you flexibility.

One of the things we've been doing - and you all have a role in this as Acts and regulations, et cetera, evolve - is the province inherited agreements that were done back in the 1950s and 1960s. We've been moving away from that. For example, when we signed the agreement with Port Hawkesbury Paper in 2012, we built into it the ability to direct wood to hardwood sawmills.

When we did the Great Northern Timber licence, we built into it that hardwood would specifically go to Group Savoie to support them, so we're doing that as part of that. Our executive director probably talks to Group Savoie every week. We're always trying to help with that flow.

More broadly, what we're doing and when I spoke about the innovation and some of the products that we're looking at and the technologies that are coming out - particularly when you get into things like biofuels or whatever - the beauty of them is that they're species agnostic. Our industry evolved over decades around spruce and fir primarily. What we can do with newer things is we can use just about any species. Hardwood, in particular, works really well when you start getting into biofuels.

We have an opportunity now to be more effective. The beauty of the diversity in Nova Scotia forests is that we do have so many tree species, but the industry has evolved around a focus on spruce and fir. Because we're broadening that out through innovation, that will enable a better mix of flow.

LISA ROBERTS: I guess my concern would be that we would somehow end up doubling-down on the high-volume, low-value forestry management orientation, because we're in a moment of crisis. I think even Savoie also needs a market for their chips. Everybody's looking for that market for the chips, but orienting our forestry industry around high volume/low value is not sustainable. It doesn't have the same economic spinoff potential as some of those higher value processed products.

One of the things that came out of the closure of Bowater was the establishment of a first community forest, which was - and I certainly don't need to tell Ms. Towers - aimed to balance those various forest values. I know that there was a conversation in the Lahey report about how the Medway Community Forest is challenged by its small size - or the inadequate size, maybe - of its Crown land licence. There was also a conversation when the initial work on the community forest was done about a second and a third community forest, one of which was in Pictou County. I'm wondering, is there any option for exploring that as Northern Pulp's licences are maybe in some flux?

JULIE TOWERS: This speaks to some of the questions you've all had and maybe for better or worse, by being involved for so long, I've seen the evolution of the forest sector in this province: environmentally, ecologically, socially, and economically. Things have changed from 1960s Acts that pretty much tied a lot of the resource and who made decisions, to evolving over time so that we are doing the community forest with Medway. I was directly involved when those evolved.

Also, one of the other aspects I'm very proud of is the Mi'kmaw Forestry Initiative that we've worked on, and we're also looking at how to develop that. We haven't spoken much about our federal government partners who have also been at the table trying to help. They're putting more money into the Indigenous Forestry Initiative, which is a national fund, so we're doing a lot of work on those sites. The community forest itself is currently 10,000 hectares, and they've been looking for more land to make it economically viable.

At the same time, those of you who deal with the southwest in particular know that the western end of the province has a lot of difficulty right now, because a big part of what makes things economically viable is the transportation cost. It's typically energy, labour, and transportation. The community forest is part of that where some of their markets - they were handling the firewood market to supply Kejimikujik, a very valuable contract for them, and someone else has that contract now apparently.

They're still operating. Right now, we're working with them and we've given them bridge funding to continue while they're sorting out some of the things they can do and evolve for their markets. Right now, they're not cutting very much at all, even on the 10,000 hectares. We're certainly in discussions with them, but now is not necessarily a time to add more land until they figure out their own plans for what they want to do. We're absolutely still having those conversations just as we are with the Mi'kmaq.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the Liberal caucus. Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: It really has been very enlightening for me. My riding is very urban, and I don't really have too many people who come to me with these issues, so this has been an incredible learning thing for me.

As I'm sitting and listening to you and hearing about the evolution, we cannot be the only province that's having this problem. The environment has become very important, and other countries are looking at it as well. I'm wondering what examples you can give us as to how other countries or other provinces have looked after this same issue. They must have had similar problems, and two or three years later, what have they done? What has this team learned from what they've done? If you can give us some examples and where we're heading - I'm sure there are some other examples you can share with us as well.

JULIE TOWERS: I'll start, and the others can add as they wish. I sit as a deputy on the deputies' committee of the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers. That's our network. Then there are groups that support that - staff as well - so we're very much tapped into what's happening in Canada. Also, as I mentioned at the start, it's a global industry, so we're very aware of that.

[11:30 a.m.]

I'd say we're seeing a couple things. The innovation side is common across the world, and that's tied into not only having more opportunities in products and processes, but it's very much tied into the low-carbon bio economy that's evolving. A lot of these options we're looking at are about replacing petroleum products, so you're seeing that grow very much.

One piece of that which we touched on was around wood heat. We know as you switch from heating with oil or other petroleum products to using wood - humans are sort of circling back to it, but there's a lot of analysis on it. You can use wood to create electricity, but it's much more efficient to use it for heating.

The request for proposals that we just put out for some of the provincial buildings, and we'll be doing more, you're seeing that evolve not only in Canada, but around the world. What's the most efficient is when you create clusters, so it's district heating. You can have basically one source that can be powering an entire residential development, a company, a hospital, you name it. There's some all across Canada: Quebec, B.C., you name it.

As far as immediate issues such as upheaval with changes in mills, for example, B.C., which I'm sure most of you are aware is going through a lot of upheaval, and that's reflective of a couple things. They're certainly suffering from trade tariffs. They had a major mountain pine beetle infestation that killed a lot of trees, and they've rushed to salvage them as quickly as they could, but they couldn't. Now they have a wood supply issue and they can't supply all their mills, which is not the same issue here.

They're going through transition programs, as well, and one of them, ironically, is exactly what Ava and Don Bureaux and others developed for the skills training: they were doing the same thing for accelerated training. We are seeing those same patterns. We're very open to seeing what others are doing and what works well. The innovation and the district heating, I'd say, are two of the biggest opportunities that we want to build upon.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Actually, my second question was about apprenticeship and what there is, and you covered a lot of it. One thing if I may ask is: The people you're dealing with, what is the age group? I know that, for example, farming is having an issue with not having people going into farming; we have an older generation that has been in farming. Is the forestry industry in the same boat, or is it younger people who have gone into it? Who are the people looking for the jobs, if you can give us some age groups, and what do you see there?

AVA CZAPALAY: The folks coming forward to ask about training and retraining, I would say the average age is around 40 to 45-ish but as young as 19 - someone very new into the profession feeling like maybe they need to get additional skills or additional certificates to make themselves more attractive as an employee - right through to older folks, but usually mid-career.

THE CHAIR: We will go into our final round. We'll do one question each because we are coming short of time; we'll do one more round, with one question for each caucus.

We will hand it over to the PC caucus. Mr. Rushton.

TORY RUSHTON: Madam Chair, just a quick question, being my first day on the committee. Is there time for committee business after the question period, or does it end?

THE CHAIR: That's when we have our committee business, after that.

TORY RUSHTON: Okay, thank you. I will speak then.

I guess my final question is a bit on vision that I hear from the sector. As you can appreciate, there are thousands of families that are affected right now with what's going on. I hear some people say that provincially they're not affected by this. Well, there's going to be a big economic impact of the changing diversity. Whether short term or long term, one could debate one side or the other.

At the end of the day, government has to be there for the people when they need it, and setting up the transition team is a step. We could argue that maybe it was a little bit too late, that things could have been done sooner than later. One of the main questions that I'm getting from the sector is: What does the vision look like for us in the time to come?

In and around that question, with a vision of what forestry is within Nova Scotia, I draw myself to the terms of reference for this committee. With an issue that's so important that has affected thousands of people and many, many jobs - yes, I think we're going to save some of the jobs, but there's still going to be many people. I appreciate the fact that you're talking about retraining and things, but the fact of the matter is in the forestry sector, a lot of people are aged, to be very honest. For them to go back to a school environment or retrain, I think we could rethink some of those visions of what we could do with some of those senior people within the forestry sector.

I draw back to the terms of reference for this committee. When I'm reading through it, I'm shocked at how important this issue is. The mandate sets out that it's a six-month committee for the people to be sitting on that, and at most, for the first four weeks, you only need four weeks of meetings on a weekly basis, and then it's up to you, Madam Chair of the committee, to decide what those meetings are going to look like and the time.

Combining my two questions, what does the vision look like? Do you think you can actually come together within only four weeks of weekly meetings and then go to whatever is decided there later? I guess I'm looking for what the vision of forestry is and what the vision of this team is going to look like on a weekly basis, monthly basis, and far beyond the six-month mandate for this committee.

KELLIANN DEAN: I'll start with the part about the committee, and then I'll turn to my colleague around the vision for forestry. Appreciating the accelerated timeline for meetings over the next month, actually, we have had those meetings; we have had five meetings weekly since the committee was formed. Six months is a timeline that was initially established, but we will see how that evolves.

I think we are committed to meeting as frequently as we need to, to develop the path forward, and to work with our colleagues. Whether that's weekly or biweekly or more, we'll do what it takes. In the terms of reference, we initially estimated that it would be weekly for now, and we gave ourselves six months in order to determine where we're at, and then we'll re-evaluate at six months to see whether we need to continue, whether we need to move in a different direction, and at what stage we're at.

With respect to vision, I'm going to hand it over to Julie to talk about the vision, but I think it's important to keep in mind that the work we're doing and the path that we're on is one of partnership with the industry, and we are co-creating. I'll turn it over to Julie, though, to speak about where we are currently with respect to the vision for forestry. Our guideline is to have an ecologically sustainable forestry sector that can compete globally. That is our overarching goal, and there will be different ways that we achieve that. We have to work hand in hand with the forestry sector.

That's why Julie is here on the transition team so, Julie, over to you on the work that your department has been doing.

JULIE TOWERS: This comes to that same thing, that it's about the forests in Nova Scotia and making sure we have the diversity and we have the choices so that it doesn't matter what perspective people come from - very strong environmental or very strong business - it's about having the opportunities to do whatever it is. Whether it's ecotourism or whether it's lumber, we should have the opportunity to do all of those things.

When we speak, and we have been, to a lot of folks, they're talking about vision. Often no one actually disagrees on that big, broad vision that you just mentioned, but what they're talking about often is around the specific outcomes. They want to know how many mills, how much land is going to be managed this way, et cetera. I always try to encourage them to think that this is such a long term - when you're talking about forests, and folks in our department do it regularly, we think in hundred-year cycles.

We're absolutely trying to help people in the immediate term, but you have to leave yourself room in terms of what could happen. We could have the same number of mills, more mills, or less mills, but I can tell you that we're only going to have forest products, whatever they might be. Whether it's lumber or mushrooms or anything else - you want to leave yourself room to have all those choices emerge, because businesses generally are a lot better at developing their businesses than I would ever be. My job is to make sure the resource is there and it's healthy, so the choices are there.

We're absolutely still continuing with a lot of those aspects. You referred to it - that's what Professor Lahey was getting at: you balance all those things to make it easy to have those choices in the long run. Our key is to help people as best we can. One of the differences is that the transition team is focused very much in a shorter term on the impacts around Northern Pulp not operating as a pulp mill in the immediate future, to make sure the supply chain is intact. This is the exact same thing we went through with Bowater and NewPage. It was to keep the critical mass of a supply chain - the woodlot owners, the contracts, the mills. That's exactly where we've been focused, because if the supply chain is there, it can evolve to whatever it needs to be. That's what we're working on.

THE CHAIR: We'll turn it over to the NDP caucus. Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think this is maybe a bit of a segue from that. We know that the closure of the Northern Pulp mill has impacted many individuals, many families, and that it's a difficult time in the province. I know that the team is preoccupied with that, but as I alluded to previously, we also know that as unwelcome as it is, we're in a moment that provides some opportunity.

We talked about one of those opportunities in terms of engaging communities about the future that they'd like to see. You mentioned workforce issues and capital projects coming down the pipe that are going to need workers. The other is that we spent the last legislative session talking about a climate emergency, but we don't hear anything about what the labour needs for this green transition that we're in - like it or not, if we want to survive - is going to look like.

We talk a lot about a just transition. This gets to business, and the Minister of Business is here. Maybe he wants to answer these questions, I don't know.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: Sure, I'll answer them. (Laughter)

CLAUDIA CHENDER: How is the transition team or the government generally - this is a question that we're asking everywhere - how are we thinking about the principles of a just transition and the transition to a greener economy as it relates to this or anything else? One - you just answered, I think - is looking at the ecological viability of the forest. Obviously, that spreads much more broadly.

Are there other ways in which we're discussing this - and I know one of the criticisms of this question has been if we're looking at lowish paid workers, that's not going to translate for employees of the mill who were at a very high wage grade who are maybe older. The reality is that a green economy is going to have all the same pay scales as our current economy. We still need management. We still need all of those things.

Maybe this is for Ms. Czapalay. Is this something that you're really grappling with here? Because the reality is not all of these people, as my colleagues have pointed out, are going to immediately find new jobs in the forestry sector. How are you taking into account this idea of the climate emergency and a green, just transition as you discuss the issues that we've been talking about today?

KELLIANN DEAN: It's interesting when you talk about jobs in the green economy. There are opportunities for people with skills to adapt those skills or upgrade or change them and redirect, whether those be for jobs that are in programming - actually, that's in Energy and Mines - or whether they would be training for some of the treatments and silviculture treatments that you provide training programs for or whether they be with other associations through Ava's work.

I think the opportunity that we have is to keep people here in Nova Scotia and make sure that we give them the chance to stay. If that means retraining that can be aligned with some of the things that you have mentioned, that's a good area of focus for us. I'm probably not answering it completely, but there is a view to how you take people who have a certain skill set from this sector and help them adapt into jobs that are green jobs, I guess. Some of the jobs they do are green jobs already. I think we would very much be looking at how we can help them and work with them to make that kind of a transition.

[11:45 a.m.]

AVA CZAPALAY: It's an interesting question, and there's a variety of ways to help workers. That's why we're taking a customized approach, worker by worker. Some people feel a real passion for the forestry sector. They have worked in the forestry sector, their families have, for generations, and they want to continue working in that sector. Others are saying they want to try something else.

I have been in here before talking about sandboxes. We have 10 sandboxes where students are encouraged to be entrepreneurial in their thinking, and one of them is at the Agricultural Campus in Truro, Cultiv8. Those are students being innovative within the agriculture sector. I think if we can encourage young people to be entrepreneurial and think entrepreneurially within our post-secondary sector, then we'll get towards the vision that you were just outlining. The Nova Scotia Community College is also very responsive to the needs of industry and the needs of the sector and will continue to offer innovative programs to students as industry demands.

JULIE TOWERS: I would just add a bit that absolutely we're observing two things across Canada. One, people who currently work in the sector want to work in the sector. They're very tightly tied. They prefer to be outdoors rather than in a committee room. They love what they do. They want to be there. In many cases, that's because it evolved in their families, and that's what they did.

What we are seeing is the labour shortage that's emerging across Canada from people who operate machines, getting people who can plant trees. There's this mindset that forestry is a low-skilled, low-tech area. What it actually is, particularly the innovation we're doing, is we call it the low-carbon bio economy. That is the focus, whether we're talking about something relatively simple coming back, like wood heat - it's a lower carbon. It's also things like the operator training we do for partial harvesting, like some of the treatments in the Lahey report. That's what we train for. It's to help people understand how they're working in there.

We have positions, and we're working across Energy and Mines, Environment, and our department, for example, on really understanding the carbon cycle and tracking it. That's the biggest issue, and often the biggest bone of contention is how you measure that. We have a specialist, and we work with the Canadian academics who are the best at measuring carbon emissions.

THE CHAIR: We'll hear from the Liberal caucus. Mr. MacLellan, one question, and we're getting short of time.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: I want to thank the deputy ministers again for being here. I think it was Claudia who pointed out, and I think it's fair to repeat, that you're not political players; you are public servants. I think that we're in a world where unfortunately, that's the reality. If the workers in the sector see this as a political fight, then we have done a disservice to the sector. That's not an accusation; that's just a fact.

When we can have avenues and venues like this to be able to share this information objectively and transparently, I think that speaks volumes to the transition team itself. Again, this isn't about one Party or the other. It's about a Public Service in a sector that really needs to work with each other to make sure that we get to the best possible place.

Obviously, this is not politically driven. It's industry driven, by and large - not discrediting the role of the transition team and who is on that team, but I think that with industry being there, the community aspect is of critical importance as well. I think that you see what Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin and Tory are doing with the Cumberland County group that they have sort of public meetings. I'm not in the room, so I don't know the tone, but it seems to be, based on the media reports, objective. They're obviously impacted by this, and they're looking for ways to get through.

That input, that feedback - and this was touched on earlier - is really critical. From a formal perspective, if someone has an idea, obviously the regions are impacted differently. The conversations that these members are having with their sector players are different than I'm having at home. There are options and ideas that came forward from that meeting that Tory and Elizabeth had, an idea about truck registration. You can give a waiver of a fee, as I think Tim had brought forward.

Innovation options: If there's some group out there that wants to be innovative, what's the formal mechanism whereby they come to you? I know websites and emails, but do they have the opportunity to participate, to present? If we want to keep this in the realm where we believe it is, which is objectively trying to get to the best possible finish line, how do we make sure that those particular groups and all the regions across the province are being heard and their ideas have an official place to be unpacked?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Dean, you can just add your closing remarks to the end of this.

KELLIANN DEAN: It says two minutes or less for closing remarks. (Laughter)

You're right. There is a formal mechanism. Anybody can email a member of the transition team. There's a couple of ways and, again, through the transition team members they're gathering feedback. If an individual or if community groups want to share with those individuals, they will bring it forward.

They can write directly to me. They can email me. I've received a lot of information directly that we're bringing forward. We get business proposals from companies that are interested in investing in the province, and then we work with our colleagues at Nova Scotia Business Inc. There are many ways people can feed that information in, and we're happy to receive it and happy to move forward and act on it and share it.

Did you want to add something, Julie?

THE CHAIR: We really don't have time.

KELLIANN DEAN: So I will give my closing remarks, which are very brief.

Thank you all very much. We do appreciate the opportunity to be here to update people, and we recognize it's important for people to understand how to access information and understand that we're here trying to support them to the best of our abilities.

We appreciate all of your questions today. Others have said it, and I will say it too: I feel very privileged to be part of this work. It's important work, and it's work that touches the lives of thousands of people throughout our province.

We've been impressed with the ideas that have been coming forward and what we've seen from the sector so far. I think most of all, these people in businesses have proven to be adaptable and resilient. We draw on that energy to keep up our end of the bargain to help in the best ways that we can and to continue to welcome feedback, listen to people, and fulfill our mandate on the transition team. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for finding the time to come in. I know your team meets on Tuesdays, but I hear that you're going to this mill and that mill, meeting here in this part of the province. Thank you for making time to fit us in, because we're limited to our time to meet before the House sitting. Thank you for being so easy to book a meeting with, and thank you for coming and the work that you're doing.

We'll excuse you. I'm sure you'll be targeted by the press right now, so you're not off duty.

We will have a very short business meeting, so please stay at the table.

If you remember, you got a piece of correspondence from the clerk; I think it came in yesterday? Yes. It's dated February 3rd from the clerk, so are there any questions about that?

Mr. Rushton, you had a question or comment?

TORY RUSHTON: In light of what we heard today - I know I still have a stack of questions. There are many other questions, in light of what the Minister of Business just elaborated on in his last question. It's important work that's taking place here for Nova Scotians, and it's a big impact - maybe one of the biggest impacts that any of us as MLAs will ever see.

I'd like to make a motion that we bring the transition team back again within a month's time and go over further questions and review of what has taken place.

THE CHAIR: The committee doesn't meet during the legislative sitting, just so that you know.

TORY RUSHTON: It's a diplomatic process. We're elected to represent the people of Nova Scotia. We don't meet in the Legislature usually on mornings; this is a morning meeting that we've had. I understand what's usually gone on in norms. Committees have been changed over the last few years since I've been elected. Times have changed.

I'd still like to table my motion.

THE CHAIR: Is there any other feedback? We have a request for a recorded vote. We have a motion on the table. We'll have a brief recess. Perhaps somebody needs to ask for an extension of time? Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I would like to ask for an extra whatever it takes us - a few minutes after 12:00 noon. I have a meeting at 12:30 p.m. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are we in agreement to extend the meeting briefly?

It is agreed.

[11:56 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[12:05 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. We will resume the meeting. There has been a request for a recorded vote. Mr. Irving.

KEITH IRVING: If I may, we'd like to propose an amendment. We agree with all of our colleagues at the table that this is a very important issue, an issue that Nova Scotians are interested in.

We feel that we should give the committee a little bit more time to do its work and that it would be appropriate to wait until after the House session, which would probably be two or two and a half months or so. That would give the committee sufficient time to do their work and have more actions to report on.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Houston.

TIM HOUSTON: I thank the member for his suggestion. I think in the case of the situation right now, two and a half months is a long time. That's the first point that I want to make.

The second point is when the transition team was initially struck, there were some undertakings from them that there would be updates provided to the public on a regular basis - weekly updates, I think, was the initial commitment. Those haven't really been taking place.

We noticed yesterday there is a website and I think we had written, as a caucus, to most ministers about this situation. Yesterday, we got a series of responses from the individual ministers, generally form letters, but a lot of them directed us to a website, and we have been monitoring that website.

We noticed that just over the last two days, some of the language on that website has changed. Yesterday it read "forestry sector support and transition." Today it reads, "Forestry Sector Transition." One thing that is totally relevant to this discussion is up until yesterday, the website used to say that updates will be shared as decisions are made. Today, that is no longer on the website.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that this is a matter of great interest to Nova Scotians, particularly those thousands of families that are directly impacted by this. They just want to know what's happening, what the transition team is coming up with. It's really silence.

What we've seen is some rushed announcements that weren't particularly clear and had to be clarified later and a lot of reactionary communications from the committee that I don't think are particularly helpful. In the absence of the transition team itself updating Nova Scotians and keeping Nova Scotians informed - and we have seen an absence of that - I believe that going forward there's a very strong possibility that we'll see even less.

The changes to the website suggest that, so in the absence of communications out to Nova Scotians, I think it's incumbent upon us as legislators to keep our finger on the pulse. I don't think waiting a couple of months because it's maybe more convenient for members who might be busy with the Legislature; I think this is important. I think that this transition committee should be communicating with Nova Scotians, and I think they seem like they'd be willing to come back before this committee.

I'm not in favour of the amendment. I would stick to the initial motion, which is that the transition team come back before this committee. It doesn't matter if the House is sitting or not, come back before this committee in this Chamber, certainly within four weeks - I think within a month was the suggestion. That's plenty of time, and I'd stick with that motion.

I'm not in favour of the amendment to push things out further. We can deal with that as we deal with that in the voting. My point is that I think it's really important that the transition team be communicating with Nova Scotians. I think we have the opportunity to make sure that happens, and that's what our focus is. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacLellan.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: Certainly I would agree with the member opposite that it is an important issue, a critical one for many people in Nova Scotia. The information sharing is vital; I agree with those two points that you made, and that's about it.

I think we're here talking to the committee that has important work in terms of the transition team: the information that they're sharing, the steps they're taking, and the work that's being done in terms of program work for support for workers, support for the sector, and the way that the transition funds are going to hopefully allow us to keep workers to the extent that we can to find new markets and those things.

I think the work is carrying on. I disagree that the communication has been terrible, and I also disagree with the member's positioning. We're here talking today about who knew what and who sent emails to whom and what was the first transition team which didn't exist, as opposed to the actual work being undertaken by the transition team to get to a point where these workers are in a better place than they are today.

I don't think this is the only mechanism. This committee is important, but it's certainly not the only mechanism for communication. I think there's a lot more to it than that, but we're back to the political bantering about what this transition team is doing. Whether or not we meet during the legislative session isn't an indication of our concern; it's the fact that this is one committee. You have an agenda set; you have work to do.

If the Progressive Conservatives want this to be bumped and have it directly after the session, then obviously we're willing to support that. I don't know what the agenda-setting process is, but if there's a way that we can help get that on the list after the session, then certainly we're willing to do that. I do support the amendment that we would do what the original idea from Tory was, that the transition team would come back, but I don't support the idea that it has to happen during the session. I'm okay with voting on the amendment that we would do it after the legislative session.

THE CHAIR: We need to vote first on the amendment. Mr. Houston.

TIM HOUSTON: I think I'll maybe connect a few dots here for the members. What we're talking about is accountability, and what we're talking about is transparency. I think it's very significant - and it should not be lost on these members, because it's not lost on the families that are impacted - that a year ago this government, by way of the Premier, said that this was being looked at. What we heard today was that wasn't the case.

Let's not let that happen again. Let's make sure that as legislators, we keep our finger on the pulse as to what this committee is up to. This is a responsibility of government. We owe it to those families that are impacted to be keeping a finger on the pulse. I think more than a quarterly check-in at this sensitive time is required. I think the amendment is a stall tactic that I don't think serves Nova Scotians in this case.

Just a question on procedure: Do we vote on the amendment and then vote on the initial motion? Just for our benefit, both amendments called to bring the committee back. The initial motion calls to bring them back in a timely fashion; the amendment wishes to defer that for longer, and that's what we're talking about here. Is my understanding correct?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts. Do you have a comment?

LISA ROBERTS: No, just that it would be great if we could vote. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: We will vote on the amendment presented by Mr. Irving.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We will now vote on the original motion, with the amendment. (Interruption) We will go to a recorded vote.

TIM HOUSTON: Will you read the motion as it stands now?

THE CHAIR: I don't have it written down. (Interruption) We don't have that in writing.

TIM HOUSTON: Maybe the member can restate his amendment that they supported.

[12:15 p.m.]

KEITH IRVING: I believe your original motion said that we should bring back the transition committee to meet this committee as witnesses, and my amendment would say that the time frame for that would be at a meeting after the sitting of the Legislature.

TIM HOUSTON: Just so I'm clear, can you read the amended motion with the changes there? The motion was that the transition team would appear before the committee within the month. I presume the Liberal members have struck out "within the month" and replaced that with "within two and a half months."

THE CHAIR: No, the nearest post-Legislature rising, the date closest to the Legislature rising, post-Legislature rising. It could be the regular meeting we would have in April. We have already had our February meeting today, and the next possible date would most likely be in April.

Are we ready for the recorded vote with the amended motion?

YEAS

NAYS

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft
Rafah DiCostanzo
Keith Irving
Brendan Maguire
Geoff MacLellan
Tory Rushton
Tim Houston
Claudia Chender
Lisa Roberts

THE CHAIR: The motion is carried.

We will now sit at the call of the clerk. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12:17 p.m.]