

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE ON  
NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Tuesday, January 24, 2023**

**Committee Room**

**The Success and Future of Nova Scotia's Climate Change Fund**

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**NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

John White (Chair)  
Dave Ritcey (Vice-Chair)  
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Chris Palmer  
Ronnie LeBlanc  
Carman Kerr  
Gary Burrill  
Lisa Lachance

[Trevor Boudreau was replaced by Larry Harrison.]

[Dave Ritcey was replaced by Tom Taggart.]

In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

**WITNESSES**

Department of Environment and Climate Change

Lora MacEachern Deputy Minister  
Jason Hollett, Associate Deputy Minister  
Mike O'Brien, Executive Director of Finance

EfficiencyOne

Stephen MacDonald, President and CEO

Clean Foundation Nova Scotia

Scott Skinner, President and CEO



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2023**

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

**1:00 P.M.**

CHAIR  
John White

VICE-CHAIR  
Dave Ritcey

THE CHAIR: I call this meeting to order. As you can hear, the noise is going to be really bad. It's not going to get any better for us, so I apologize for that. We will have to speak up today. I do apologize. We can't stop this construction behind us, but there's construction upstairs that has been stopped for us, so we should be grateful.

This is the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. I am MLA John White from Glace Bay-Dominion, and the Chair for the committee. Today we will be hearing from presenters regarding The Success and Future of Nova Scotia's Climate Change Fund.

I ask you to please turn off your phones or put them on silent. In case of emergency, we are to go out this side door, the Granville Street exit, and walk up to Grand Parade, where we can all be accounted for.

I'll ask the committee members to introduce themselves for the record, just stating your name and your constituency, starting on my left here with MLA Taggart.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: For the record, I'd like to recognize that Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb is on my right and on my left is committee clerk Tamer Nusseibeh.

The topic today is the success and future of Nova Scotia's climate change fund. I'll ask the witnesses to just briefly introduce yourselves and where you're from, just for the record, starting on my left with Mr. O'Brien.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern has some opening comments and a presentation for us.

LORA MACEACHERN: It's a pleasure to join you to speak to our work at the Department of Environment and Climate Change, work that is addressing the global climate emergency and ensuring the long-term health, protection, and sustainability of our department.

We've done some introductions. Joining me today are Jason Hollett, Associate Deputy Minister at the department; and Mike O'Brien, Executive Director of Finance. I'm also pleased that we have two of our key partners here today. Our response to climate change requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. We cannot be successful in achieving our mandate without strong and effective partners such as the Clean Foundation and EfficiencyOne.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge Scott's role as Chair of the Minister's Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity, a group of external-to-government experts who provide advice to the minister.

We've had a very busy and productive year at the department, and I'm very proud of the work that our team has taken across the finish line since I joined the department 13 months ago. I'd like to thank our committed and passionate ECC team for their work, their professionalism, and service to the people of Nova Scotia.

I was asked to join you today to speak to the success and future of the climate change fund, a new fund created last Fall but not yet launched. It will be one more tool in our tool box to help Nova Scotians adapt and respond to climate change. Although I do not have all the details as yet, I can share information on how it will support our mandate and benefit Nova Scotians. I also want to assure Nova Scotians that the government and our department understand the gravity of the climate change emergency. We are listening to Nova Scotians.

As recently as November, Nova Scotians told us in some research we conducted that climate change is one of the top five issues that they care about. Seven out of the ten Nova Scotians we heard from last Fall told us that they strongly believe that climate change

is impacting the world around them, and that urgent action is needed. We know they are feeling the impacts of climate change, from increasing flooding to more damage to their homes and stronger storms. Farmers and fishers are feeling the impacts too and our youth are concerned. We hear you and we're taking some strong action.

In the last year, government has achieved its legislated 2022 targets in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, released a provincial-wide climate change risk assessment, released a comprehensive five-year climate change plan, designated 14 additional sites as protected areas, invested \$20 million in private land conservation, and invested over \$24 million since fiscal year 2021 in climate change initiatives such as programs that will help low- and middle-income Nova Scotians access free heat pumps and electrical upgrades. This is in addition to renewables, sustainable transportation, and climate change adaptation programs, and much more work is under way.

I now have just a few slides to run you through some of the details. Turning first to the new climate change fund, it was established in the Fall of 2022 legislative session through amendments to the Environment Act. It is a new funding tool to support climate change action in the province. The new climate change fund will be in place by 2024 and will at that time replace the existing Green Fund. It will support initiatives that help us meet our climate change goals; the eligible purposes are outlined in the legislation. Some of those purposes are listed on the right-hand side of this slide, and as you can see, they're focused on addressing the climate emergency.

In terms of next steps for the climate change fund, this next slide sets out the time frames involved. Development of the new climate change fund is happening in tandem with the development of the new Output-Based Pricing System, as you can see in this timeline. This year marks the transition period between the cap and trade program and OBPS. The focus of this year will be to finalize the program details with full implementation on the OBPS in 2023, and the climate change fund in 2024.

As noted earlier, the climate change fund is one tool in our tool box. The overall focus of our work is moving toward our climate change goals as set out in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. We are making significant progress. Some examples of this work are set out in the slide. Notably, we released the provincial climate change plan and risk assessment last year, and we're making good progress on our land protection and other goals as well.

Behind the progress that is being made toward our climate goals, there are dozens of projects, programs, and policies, a handful of which are described on this slide. These initiatives are being supported by staff from across government, as well as communities, industry stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations. The recently released climate change plan outlines 68 actions across 13 departments that will continue to push us forward.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to speak about government's commitment to climate investments. We're not just talking about it; we're ramping up action on climate change. The Province has invested over \$240 million since fiscal year 2021 in this work. On this slide, you can see the breakdown of the types of work that have been funded in that time. This funding makes a real difference for Nova Scotians, and on the next two slides, I'll just briefly highlight the excellent work of our two key delivery partners, EfficiencyOne and Clean Foundation.

EfficiencyOne administers several programs that help Nova Scotians lower their energy bills and improve the efficiency of their homes and businesses. This slide gives just a few examples of outcomes that we have seen from funded programs since fiscal 2021. Participants in these programs receive thousands of dollars in helping us lower our greenhouse gas emissions. I'm sure Mr. MacDonald will be able to provide more details on these programs and their impacts.

Finally, programs run by the Clean Foundation have - among many things - helped to develop in-demand climate-change related skills for youth across the province. Their Next Ride and EVAssist rebate programs are accelerating the shift to electric vehicles and e-bikes by making those technologies more accessible. Thousands of Nova Scotians have now had the opportunity to experience electric mobility. I'm sure Mr. Skinner will be able to provide more details on the positive impact these programs are having in our communities.

Thank you very much. Those are my comments and presentation. I'll turn it back to the Chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister MacEachern. I understand, Mr. MacDonald, that you have opening comments?

STEPHEN MACDONALD: Good afternoon. As I mentioned, I'm the President and Chief Executive Officer of EfficiencyOne. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present before the committee today.

EfficiencyOne is an independent non-profit organization. We are governed by an independent board of directors. We help people transform the way they use energy and achieve their energy goals, save money, conserve resources, improve well-being, and combat climate change.

We are proud to be the operator of the Efficiency Nova Scotia franchise, which allows us the exclusive right to use the Efficiency Nova Scotia brand to administer both electric and non-electric energy efficiency programs. This model - an independent one-window all-fuels administrator across all sectors - has received national and international recognition. It was created in 2009 by the Province as a result of an extensive stakeholder consultation process, and it was also strengthened in 2014 by formalizing in legislation its

status as a public utility. The model was further strengthened by legislation in 2022 by clarifying our role in helping Nova Scotians transition off oil and other amendments to provide stability and enable longer-term planning.

Nova Scotia is a recognized leader in Canada for our energy savings and inclusive programs, including services for low-income homeowners and renters and innovative partnerships with Mi'kmaw communities, which encourages the use of community-preferred contractors.

Annually, Efficiency Canada, a research group based at Carleton University, benchmarks all Canadian provinces and territories across 54 metrics, such as energy savings from public utility programs, electric vehicle registrations, building code adoption, and industrial energy management. In 2022, Nova Scotia ranked second overall and first for energy efficiency programs. Nova Scotia has consistently placed in the top three since the scorecard was first launched.

The scorecard also notes that this year's rankings are due in large part to improvements to overall efficiency programs, including an increased commitment to programming for low-income Nova Scotians and diverse communities. The provincial government's commitments under the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act and peak electricity demand savings have also contributed to this ranking.

Nova Scotians have benefited enormously from both the model and investment in energy efficiency through lower energy bills and greenhouse gas emission reductions across the province. In 2011, approximately 24 per cent of Nova Scotia's overall GHG emission reductions have been the result of energy efficiency, saving nearly \$1.5 billion in energy costs, including \$208 million in savings for low-income homeowners and renters.

We work with over 300 partners, employing 2,600 people directly across the province, with more than 50 per cent of these partners located outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality. We know there is more work that can be done, and the need to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions as we move to a low-carbon net-zero future is critical. Energy efficiency is one of the most important tools in accelerating Nova Scotia's efforts to do this, and can be a powerful tool in addressing affordability.

For many people, their energy bill is often their largest bill, and higher energy costs disproportionately impact households with lower incomes. Depending on fuel prices, 40 per cent of households in Nova Scotia experience some form of energy poverty. Installing just one mini-split heat pump in an oil-heated home can reduce energy costs by 15 to 25 per cent, and additional upgrades like insulation and draft-proofing, or switching to LED lighting, can not only move families out of energy poverty, but their homes will be more comfortable, have better air quality, and will increase in value.

Thank you, and I'm looking forward to your questions.

[1:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Skinner.

SCOTT SKINNER: As mentioned, I'm the President and CEO of the Clean Foundation, and I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee today.

The Clean Foundation is an independent charitable organization governed by an independent board of directors. We were created in 1988 through the passing of the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation Act. Over the past 35 years, we've worked alongside the Government of Nova Scotia and many others to deliver on environmental priorities.

We work collaboratively with our many partners to do things like reduce energy poverty, promote social equity and support historically marginalized communities, develop the clean economy workforce, protect the natural environment, and educate and promote action on climate change. Today we are predominantly a program delivery non-profit. Through 40-plus active programs, we support the efforts to achieve the actions included in Nova Scotia's climate plan and the goals and targets included in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act.

To support these efforts, the Clean Foundation also works alongside the Government of Nova Scotia to develop smart climate policy. We helped engage Nova Scotians on their climate priorities leading up to the passing of EGCCRA, and that work can be found in a *What We Heard Report* on the [cleanfuture.ca](http://cleanfuture.ca) website.

More recently, we've been working with the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, along with our cross-departmental advisory committee, on a clean investment plan that is looking to define the opportunities where Nova Scotia has the winning conditions to succeed in the low-carbon economy ahead of us.

Some examples of our work that were included on the slide earlier included a program that I get most excited about: Clean Leaders, which places students each Summer in environmental- and climate-focused paid internships at organizations all over Nova Scotia. This program has been growing each year, with more students and more employers applying to participate each cycle.

Next Ride is an engagement campaign that helps Nova Scotians learn and experience driving an EV as the market is shifting toward zero-emission vehicles. EV Assist Electrify provides rebates to help in the purchase of EVs and e-bikes that will help lower our transportation emissions. We've been very pleasantly surprised at the popularity of e-bikes, which also contributes to exercise and healthy living.



As we've seen with Fiona and its aftermath, action on climate change is urgent for Nova Scotia. With EGCCRA, the climate plan, and the climate risk assessment in place, we have a great foundation to guide our activities in the years ahead. I feel very privileged to lead the amazing team at the Clean Foundation and to work with so many inspiring partners around our province as we look forward to the hard work of implementing these climate initiatives. We also need to drive Nova Scotia toward a safe, resilient, and prosperous future with inclusive opportunities for our many communities while we work on the path to net zero.

Thank you, and I look forward to the questions and discussion this afternoon.

THE CHAIR: Before I open the floor for comments, I just want to remind you to not speak until I recognize your name so that the microphone comes on and it turns red, especially today with the background noise in particular. It's the only way they can record the meeting for us. We will wrap up questions at 2:40 p.m. to take care of the rest of our business, at which time I will ask the witnesses to leave the meeting for us.

The floor is now open for questioning. MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: There is an awful lot of ground to think about in an hour and three quarters. I wanted to ask first of Deputy Minister MacEachern about the Output-Based Pricing System and where we are. We're in this situation since January 1<sup>st</sup> - that's the world we're in, but I believe I understood you to say, which is the impression we've had - we don't have a regulatory framework. We don't have the regulations under which it's going to work. Do we know when we're going to have them?

LORA MACEACHERN: Yes, absolutely. As you know, in the last sitting of the legislative session, the government had passed amendments to the Environment Act, and those amendments to the Environment Act set up the Output-Based Pricing System. It sets the overall framework, so that's really important to refer back to that piece of legislation because it really does set the go-forward.

As I touched on in my presentation, we're in a transition period right now because the switch between the cap and trade program and the new program does require this year in order to wind up and do the compliance that's required under the cap and trade program and move fully into the Output-Based Pricing System. While it's in effect as of 2020 - at the beginning of 2023, the beginning of this month, we're doing our work to wind down cap and trade and do work on some regulations that will more fully articulate the Output-Based Pricing System.

What's envisioned and will be coming next is to set up the registration requirements and provide further articulation of the means for compliance. So we envision two sets of regulation coming forward over the next year, and by the time cap and trade is finally

wound down at the end of the year, we'll be ready for a full compliance of our Output-Based Pricing System. Lots is in play right now on this.

GARY BURRILL: I'm thinking, then, about the parameters of the program, also in terms of revenue. I mean, we know who the large emitters are. I would think it would therefore be possible to have a general idea of what the revenue extent is going to be for the program. Does the department now have an estimate of what the revenue's going to be that the fund is going to be able to work from?

LORA MACEACHERN: It's a bit too early to say what we anticipate the revenue coming in from OBPS will be just yet. As I said, we're still working through some of the requirements, so it's a bit too early. We do anticipate revenue, obviously, and that's the reason why the government has also established a climate change fund as part of the legislation that was passed in the Fall sitting.

What goes with OBPS is also this new climate change fund that provides for the funds associated with the OBPS to be able to go into that fund, but other sources of revenue as well that maybe felt appropriate. The Treasury Board has the ability with this new fund to direct other funds into that new fund as well.

There is a lot under way in 2023, and we'll have a better assessment as we go, but certainly the framework is well set up under the amendments that were made to the Environment Act in the last sitting of the Legislature.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I guess I want to start by saying I was pretty impressed with both the Department of Environment and Climate Change, EfficiencyOne, and the Clean Foundation - where we've gotten so far with respect to the carbon reduction, I guess. I liked what I heard there from Mr. MacDonald, and that's who my question will go to. Specifically, that 24 per cent of the reductions to date have been through energy efficiency, which I guess is electricity and oil. Would that be right? (Interruption) Yes, okay.

Also, the 50/50 uptake in the rural/urban divide, which is where I'm really coming from here. As you know, a lot of the older homes - rural homes - are older stock with less-efficient.

Having said that, the energy costs are going up because of the carbon tax, and I know that Nova Scotians feel the urgency. Certainly, the folks in rural Nova Scotia feel the urgency to make their homes more efficient - middle- and lower-income families in particular. Can you share a bit about how your organization can help efficiencies at home, and how you measure your success?

STEPHEN MACDONALD: There's a number of different ways that efficiency programs can help Nova Scotians across the province regardless of where they live, regardless of their home, the age of their home, or the heating source of their home, if you will.

I'll go back a little bit and just talk a little bit about the model we have for energy efficiency here in the province, which I think is really fundamental. It has been around for about 11 or 12 years now. That's an all-fuels administrator. You as a homeowner don't need to worry about whether your home is heated with electricity, with oil, whether you burn wood, or whether it's natural gas here in the city, for example. We design programs and offer programs regardless of the heating source.

The programs have basic principles to them, and that's using less energy by making your home more efficient. That's primarily building-envelope measures such as insulation, draft-proofing, or windows upgrade in some cases, if you will - having a tighter envelope to your home. It's also looking at mechanical systems in the home itself - that might be switching to a more efficient air-source heat pump. In the case of an oil-heated home, it could be putting in one or more of those mini-splits to help reduce your oil usage, for example. There are other more efficient technologies.

We design programs such that there's something for everyone, if you will. That's the basic premise.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you very much for being here. I just wanted to go back, actually, to some of the questions of my colleague MLA Burrill. I'm wondering, basically, what's happening in 2023. I understand on the regulation side it's a transitory period and those are being developed, but with the Green Fund/climate change fund, the revenues from the two remaining cap and trade settlements - will those go into the Green Fund or climate change fund? And will programming continue this year, and under what auspices?

LORA MACEACHERN: The cap and trade program continues through this year. With that, the Green Fund remains. We've had a couple of auctions last year, so there are funds in the Green Fund associated with those auctions. There will be at least two more auctions before the end of the year, and those will be the last auctions for the cap and trade and the last remaining money that is going into the Green Fund.

Our typical approach is to spend monies from the Green Fund in the year in which they are received, so we'd be looking at what remains in the Green Fund this year and what will be coming into the Green Fund through to the end of the program. Then, of course, 2024 is when our climate change fund is up and running.

What government has said with the passing of the climate change plan - the climate action plan - at the end of December is that those are our priorities for addressing the impacts of climate change. We'll be looking to focus those funds that are in the Green Fund and the future funds that go into the climate change fund in order to advance the priorities that are set out in that climate change plan.

LISA LACHANCE: In terms of the fund going forward, I know you've talked about the Act as the framing piece of legislation, obviously. But in the nitty-gritty, what are the focus areas that you would recommend? I actually may ask Mr. MacDonald or Mr. Skinner to comment on that, if that's okay.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacDonald.

STEPHEN MACDONALD: Sure. I think as Deputy Minister MacEachern said, as I understand it, the fund is still being designed in terms of the usage of it. Having said that, the Province has in the past used some of the funds for investment in energy efficiency - and there are some examples in the deputy minister's presentation.

Being asked where future funding could be directed, I think efficiency still is a high need. There are many Nova Scotians who can and should benefit from energy efficiency upgrades. It's a need that won't go away in the short term. Certainly if asked, I would highlight energy efficiency as being an important use of those monies and funds.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: There's no doubt about it: We have a lot of experience and capability and intelligence here before us this afternoon, so thank you for everything you're all doing.

My question is for Deputy Minister MacEachern. I've had the opportunity to speak in support of some legislation that we put through in the Legislature in the last year and a half. I just want to ask about the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. Can you speak about where we are and the progress being made on that, where we are in achieving some of the goals that we laid out in that, and any financial supports that have been provided through that? Can you speak to that a little bit more and elaborate?

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm really happy to speak to that. Of course, I know everyone around the table knows about the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, the first step that was taken by Minister Halman and the government advancing environmental change here in Nova Scotia when they took office. It really is the most ambitious legislation in the country, I would say, with 28 goals to advance environment and climate change in the province. It really sets the stage for us in the department as to what we will be actioning over the next number of years.

[1:30 p.m.]

We're really pleased to say in the legislation there are specific target dates for many of the actions that are set out there, and a number of them were for 2022, so we really needed to act quickly to achieve those targets. I'm really pleased to say that we were able to do so for the number of targets that are listed for 2022. For example, we released the five-year climate action plan, which really sets the stage for us in climate action, in December.

We also released a province-wide risk assessment, which was another target in the legislation for 2022. A provincial risk assessment hadn't been done in many years, for well over a decade or more, in Nova Scotia, so that one is now in place and is a really important piece of information for anyone to be able to refer to in terms of climate adaptation specific to Nova Scotia. That would be another example.

We took action to advance the next steps toward the environmental racism panel, which was another commitment in the legislation. An appointment was made for Augie Jones to be the first member of that panel and to work with the community to establish a draft terms of reference going forward. We also reinvigorated the Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity, and another commitment in the legislation was that the Premier attend the Round Table, and he did so. He's required to do so annually and did so in November.

We're also making some good progress under the legislation in terms of our land protection goals. The government announced back before the holidays, a \$20 million investment in private land conservation to the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust and announced 14 additional protected areas. That was quite significant.

I also wouldn't want to forget the significant investment in energy efficiency programming, which was also an important feature of the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. There was \$140 million invested in programs for free heat pumps - Steve would be able to speak more about that - and a \$100 million additional investment in HARP, which is also very helpful for vulnerable Nova Scotians.

I could go on at length. I'm really proud of all of the hard work that's happening in our department, and we really take that legislation to heart. It is our road map, and now we have a climate plan that is an additional road map for us, and we're really looking forward to all that we can do in the next period of time.

THE CHAIR: MLA LeBlanc.

RONNIE LEBLANC: We've been discussing this morning the Green Fund being replaced by the new Nova Scotia climate change fund. Could you elaborate on the

similarities or the differences between the two funds to try to give a better assessment of what we're looking at in the future?

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm happy to do that. The obvious similarity is that they're both focused on climate change initiatives. The purposes set out for both funds in legislation are climate change initiatives. In looking at the climate change fund, we took the opportunity to update the provisions, to look at the purposes and expand those so that we have more ability to direct the funding to climate change initiatives that are of priority, and are of current priority, so there's more flexibility there. It also includes an equity lens which we think is really important as well. That would be one difference, one updating that we took the opportunity to take.

The other aspect of it in terms of differences is around the monies that can go into the fund. While the Green Fund was pretty focused on cap and trade revenue going into that fund, this fund has broader abilities. It has a provision around OBPS funding going into the fund, but it's broader, so government has the ability to direct funding from other sources into that fund if it feels it would be helpful and appropriate for advancing climate change in the province. Treasury and Policy Board has oversight of the fund, and can direct those additional funds into it should it feel the need.

THE CHAIR: MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: Thanks, everyone, for being here. I certainly appreciate all the work you're each doing. The topic we've been called to talk about is the success and future of the Nova Scotia climate change fund. In my view, it's theoretical. It's in the future, it's in 2024. The current fund is the Green Fund which expired three weeks ago. My question is around that transition.

We've got a year to transition. Deputy Minister MacEachern mentioned more flexibility - I would say potential more flexibility, potential more equity, potential broader ability. What assurances do Nova Scotians have on that transition on funding and program service delivery - I'll ask everyone that. What assurances do Nova Scotians have that programs will be able to be rolled out similar to the predecessor? That would be for Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Skinner, and Deputy Minister MacEachern.

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm happy to start off and then turn it over to my colleagues to add. In terms of assurances, the first point that comes to mind is that with any program that has multi-year commitments, we have contracts with our service providers. They're multi-year contracts, so even when the Green Fund switches to the climate change fund, our commitment to our service providers contains a contract that obligates us to continue to do that. Of course, we will always be compliant with the terms of our agreements. Rest assured that those programs will continue.

As well, you all have copies of the climate plan in front of you, and you can see from that climate plan that there's a significant portion that's focused on energy efficiency programming and the kinds of programs that are delivered not just by EfficiencyOne, but also by the Clean Foundation.

As I said, the climate fund represents our marching orders. Those are our actions to advance over the next number of years, and you'll see that there's an expansion and a continuation of many of the excellent programs that they're delivering and advancing more. I think that there's a full commitment and assurance there that the good work of our partners will continue.

STEPHEN MACDONALD: I'd like to make a couple of comments. The first is that efficiency programs benefit from funding from multiple sources, not just the provincial government although the Province over the years has been a substantial funder and supporter of energy efficiency programs.

Efficiency programs are also funded in part through electricity rate payers through demand side management, and is largely to fund programs designed to make the use of electricity more efficient. Also, the federal government has been providing substantial funding over the last several years with respect to energy efficiency. What we've experienced in our time is that all three funding sources, if you will, have actually increased their funding each year, and I see that continuing.

When you look at legislation that the Province introduced, the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, there are a couple of very important goals. One is 80 per cent renewable for our electricity system by 2030, and the other is net zero by 2050. In the work that we've done, and I think others would have a similar view, it's very difficult for the Province to meet those goals without a substantial contribution for energy efficiency, and certainly it would be very difficult for the Province to get there and for Nova Scotians to get there affordably without a substantial contribution for energy efficiency.

I'm quite pleased to hear the deputy's comments about a commitment to energy efficiency, and I think when I look long-term, there's more work that can be done for energy efficiency, and I'm very confident about funding going forward.

SCOTT SKINNER: I concur with a lot of what Mr. MacDonald said, and I think he brings up an important point. When our organizations look to fund these initiatives, we're looking at the provincial government, but also other orders of government to contribute as well to make sure that we're driving the best options for our citizens at this really important time. When we contract this work, it comes with a pretty detailed set of deliverables. We meet with the department every year to make sure that we're on track.

It has its checks and balances to make sure we're spending money on the right thing, which I think is part of the question we should all be asking. Where we are now, it's also a really good point where we have a climate plan that points us toward 2030 and 2050, where we can determine where we need to spend our money and effort. Both the climate action plan and EGCCRA have annual reporting requirements in them, so we can take a look at how things are going and make change into the future.

We have a big challenge ahead of us on a lot of these things, because the math of climate change is really difficult, and that's only part of the question. The other half is the resiliency of our communities and how we're going to adapt to a changing climate and big storms. We need to make sure that we're making the right decisions with our investments, and we're creating the conditions to create good jobs around the province and building that capacity with job security and good pay.

As I mentioned in my opening comments, I think we have all of the things in place for a good foundation, but we need to work together through accountability and transparency every year going forward to make sure we're making the right decisions. It's too important not to get it right.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: My question is for the department, either the deputy minister or the associate deputy minister. I don't want Mr. Hollett to get away scot-free here; hopefully he'll get a chance to chime in.

My question focuses on the climate change plan that you went through so nicely in the opening, and it has some really ambitious targets and goals in it for greenhouse gas reduction, for helping communities thrive, and all the other aspects of it that are quite ambitious.

I did hear Mr. Skinner say that there are annual reporting requirements, so I'd love to hear about that from the department. What is officially the reporting and letting everyone know how things are going with this plan over the course of the next eight, 10, 12 years?

LORA MACEACHERN: In terms of the climate plan and also as well with the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, there's an annual reporting requirement, so we're really pleased about having that in both the legislation and in the climate plan as well, because it gives us a chance to speak to the progress, and also an opportunity to get feedback, in terms of how things are going.

The five-year plan has a bit of a window. We want to make sure that we're focusing in the right areas at the right time, and as priorities change, that we have the ability to be flexible and change, knowing the strong commitment to those 68 actions that are set out in



the plan, and the 28 that are in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act.

[1:45 p.m.]

JASON HOLLETT: I think Deputy Minister MacEachern covered most of the really important points on the annual report and requirements for the plan, the Green Fund, the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. We do have a commitment to accountability and transparency from that standpoint. In our review of what happens in other jurisdictions and what we've seen from academic studies of what the best practices are, that really stands out as a strong requirement.

Peeling that back a little bit further, I think what's important for us is that we're working closely with the 13 departments and agencies across government that are also committed to deliver the 68 actions in the plan to make sure that we're getting regular updates for them on the progress, on the goals, and the commitments that they're responsible for, and working with our partners like EfficiencyOne and Clean Foundation to make sure that they're delivering. It's as the deputy minister said, we're able to adjust to new opportunities or challenges as they arise, and be accountable to Nova Scotians because, ultimately, we want to make sure that we're addressing the climate emergency in the proper way.

Then it's establishing what the great targets or the measures are that we need to be reporting on. Ultimately, greenhouse gas emission reductions are what we have legislated in EGCCRA, but there are so many other things that we can and should be reporting on, such as renewable energy use, EV adoption, how we're doing on climate change adaptation, and other things that we really look forward to being able to report to Nova Scotians on in a comprehensive way.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: We were speaking before about the large emitters side of the equation, but I want to ask you also about the other side of the carbon pricing matter, the consumer carbon pricing system. The government speaks a great deal about the carbon price, carbon price coming and so on, but they tend to not speak a great deal about the rebates that are coming.

Can you tell us when we'll know about when the carbon price is going to be implemented in Nova Scotia, and when we'll know about the rebate structure and the cheques that people in Nova Scotia will be getting?

JASON HOLLETT: I would defer any questions on the detail of the consumer carbon tax to the federal government. They're the ones that will be implementing it, so we can only speak to what we've learned from them through their recent announcements. From

what we understand, the consumer carbon tax will come into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, and that would be the date that Nova Scotians potentially receive their rebates for the first time.

When the federal government made their announcements on the program applying in Nova Scotia, they did include information on potential rebates for the province as well. If I recall, it's up to \$250 per year per family here in the province. Again, I would defer to them on the details of the implementation.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: I wanted to go back to the climate risk assessment, which, of course, is a really important piece of work, and important to situate us all in terms of what's going on. I think for many of us, we are seeing from survey data that Nova Scotians are aware of climate change and seeing it in their daily lives. Certainly, that's what we hear from folks who are farmers and fishers, and that sort of thing.

I'm wondering if you could dive a little bit deeper in terms of specifically how you're mobilizing around adaptation. I know in the risk assessment, it talks about increasing climate change adaptation capacity across government by developing implementation strategies across government. I'm wondering who's leading that work, who's accountable for it, how it's going, and what sort of funding has been attached to adaptation work in Nova Scotia.

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm very happy to talk about the work that's happening on climate adaptation. You focused on one aspect of the work, and it is a significant portion, although there's more under way that we can speak to as well.

I think what you're referring to there is our Climate Adaptation Leadership Program, and that has been in place over the last number of years. We've got a small team within the climate change division of the department that are working on that, and working and supporting some other key government departments and key sectors to develop adaptation strategies. These strategies are in order to assist certain departments and key sectors with the priority issues in order to be able to adapt to climate change in their sectors.

There has been good work that has been done and good connection with community and sectors through that initiative. You'll see in the climate plan that we are looking to expand that. A couple of the actions are around expanding it so that every government department is working in conjunction with their stakeholders and partners on strategies specific to those sectors. It's working on the implementation of those strategies because, while it's important to have strategies and plans, it's also important to have those come into place. That's a significant part of the action plan.

Also, one of the actions in the action plan is to establish coordinators and businesses that will be able to bring that adaptation knowledge and experience into the business and be able to effect change from within.

Those are a couple of things that come to mind relating to adaptation, and we've got many more. CLIMAtlantic is another great example that I'll just take a moment to highlight. It's a partnership that has been in place for a couple of years now. It's a data hub partnership with the other Atlantic provinces where real-time data and information are available about climate change. That hub makes it available to the public or anyone who wants it.

We've got one staff person who's linked with CLIMAtlantic - a great, knowledgeable source who goes and does presentations to anyone who's looking for them about the very specific issues around climate change that are pertinent to Nova Scotia and the Atlantic provinces.

LISA LACHANCE: Can I ask a follow-up question?

THE CHAIR: Actually, I apologize, but I'm going to decline your request. I have six questions asked from the NDP caucus and I have three already from the PC caucus, with three coming up. I want to be fair to the Liberal caucus. I'm worried about the time. I'll put you back on the speakers list, if you don't mind.

MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: Climate change is certainly a huge concern of a lot of people, but another huge one, too, is that people are very concerned about how they're going to live on a day-to-day basis and the help required.

My question, I guess, is for the deputy minister, as well as Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Skinner. Can you delve a little bit deeper into the programs that will really help Nova Scotians save money? That's something that we will encounter on the front line.

THE CHAIR: Who wants to answer it? Deputy Minister MacEachern. Looks like she's biting at the mic. (Laughter)

LORA MACEACHERN: I actually think our colleagues down at the end of the table will have a lot to say about this question. It's certainly a very important one.

My high-level comment about it is that this focus on energy efficiency is really important. That has many net benefits. It helps us to achieve our climate change goals and reduces GHG emissions, but also can really have that positive impact of lowering people's bills when they take those steps. That's a really key one.

With that, I'll just refer it down to others because of the programs they administer.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Skinner.

SCOTT SKINNER: I'll be quick, because I think this is mostly a question for Stephen and the programs at Efficiency Nova Scotia.

It's a very good question. The good thing is that smart climate policy fights inflation. Moving to renewables and fuel switching, getting technologies like heat pumps after you have insulation in your home - those help address costs. We know that people who are on fixed incomes, especially, are really struggling at this point.

I'll stop there and hand it over to Steve, if you will, and you can talk a bit more about your programs.

STEPHEN MACDONALD: Efficiency programs have an incredible benefit in addressing affordability for Nova Scotians. I'll talk a little bit about our residential programs, but I don't want to miss the opportunity to talk about efficiency programs and how they help businesses, which ultimately help all Nova Scotians as well.

On the residential side, we have a number of programs. One of the most important programs is one called HomeWarming, which the Clean Foundation delivers in partnership with EfficiencyOne. It's incredibly important. It's an income-qualified program so if you meet certain income thresholds, we will provide the homeowner with free upgrades at no cost: installation, draft-proofing, whatnot. It has a big impact on reducing energy bills. I'm sure you're aware, and all committee members are aware, that energy costs are increasing, the price of oil has doubled in the last year, 18 months.

The homeowner who goes through the HomeWarming program, over the life of the upgrades - so think of how long insulation lasts - can save anywhere of up to \$35,000, \$37,000 over the lifetime of those upgrades. It makes a significant impact on their energy bill, and a real impact on their lives.

We have other programs. One of them is called Home Energy Assessment. Many of you may have had this done at your own home. This is where a licensed energy auditor would come in and do a test of the efficiency of your home, a blower door test. Essentially think of it like a benchmark. The auditor would provide recommendations to the homeowner. If the homeowner does certain upgrades, the auditor will come back, do a post-audit, verify the upgrades have been made. We'll provide a financial incentive to help the homeowner offset the cost of those upgrades.

The Province, just in late 2022, announced an investment into both of those programs, which the deputy minister referred to. With the HomeWarming program, mini-split heat pumps will be added to that program, so that will be an additional savings to

homeowners, anywhere from an additional 15 to 25 per cent savings on their energy bill. For the Home Energy Assessment Program, there will be increased incentives for moderate- to middle-income Nova Scotians. Those upgrades and increased incentives should be launching very shortly. Enhanced supports, because of the additional funding provided by the Province for low- to middle-income Nova Scotians.

We also have other programs that benefit Nova Scotians through affordable housing. If you're a community association or someone owns a multi-unit residential building in a low-income area, we have increased incentives for those types of properties, which will save both the landlord and the tenant on heating costs. Of course, the objective with this type of program is to make sure those savings transfer as much as possible to the tenant, because ultimately they're the ones who are impacted by the bills themselves.

We also have a very unique program that's been operating for a few years now in partnership with our Mi'kmaw communities. In partnership with all 13 bands, we have a program called the Mi'kmaw Home Energy Efficiency Project. It provides building envelope upgrades to band-owned homes for heat pumps. Funding is now or shortly will be in place to upgrade all band-owned homes across Nova Scotia. It's a very powerful program, and as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we use community-preferred contractors wherever possible to work with the communities, and the bands themselves select which homes to upgrade. It's very much a partnership, if you will.

I can continue on with small business or I can talk it a little later. I'll defer to you, Mr. Chair. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: My question is for Deputy Minister MacEachern. The Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act has introduced a strong environmental plan, and a better plan than the carbon tax, which is making everything more expensive and unaffordable. What other tools do you believe will be effective in addressing climate change that are new, is what I'm looking for.

LORA MACEACHERN: What comes to mind - and I'll ask my colleagues as well what they have in mind - is all of the many actions that are set out in the climate action plan. It's quite broad, and I think you're quite accurate to point out that carbon pricing is just one tool or one means. It's an important one, but there are many other ways to achieve our goals as it relates to climate change, and those are really well set out in this action plan.

The plan covers three general areas, and the first is around responding to climate impacts. It gets at the climate adaptation issues and the need for good, solid information, and addressing those information gaps so that Nova Scotians can really understand the risks that are out there and what steps we can take now to mitigate what happens going forward. Then there's a focus around all that we can do to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and

many of these items overlay one another, but we talked a lot about the energy efficiency programs.

[2:00 p.m.]

There's also a focus on creating climate-resistant buildings and some actions around that, and cleaner transportation options, which we haven't had a chance to speak about too much. There's a number of actions associated with that around establishing a greening the fleet strategy, doing electric public transit in the future, developing a new transportation efficiency strategy, and then the third portion of the climate plan is all around seizing opportunities for a cleaner, sustainable economy. We haven't had a chance to touch too much on that but it's about expanding the partnerships with others, recognizing that it's not the actions of just government that determines this. Although quite important, it's all hands on deck.

It's everyone on board in community and in business, looking at what they can do to support these changes, and developing the skills for the clean economy is so critical. We need people to be able to be skilled and do the job, and that's why the work of the Clean Foundation in training up our youth with the skills that they need to support this transition is so important.

Also it's investing in innovative clean technology. That's the area of focus of our colleague department at Natural Resources and Renewables in many ways: creating a green hydrogen action plan in the future, a clean investment plan, a new clean fuels fund. There are 68 broad actions, and you raise an excellent point - we need to be focused on all of this and not just one tool.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: My question is for Mr. MacDonald, and I just wanted to compliment you on your last answer. It was so complete. You answered about three of my questions. (Laughter)

I have one that I don't think you touched on, but I think you alluded to it. We talked about the residential supports, First Nations supports, affordable housing supports, but you talked a little bit about business supports. In preparing for this meeting, I noticed on your website you talk about preferred partnerships with businesses that want to work with the green economy. Can you talk to a little bit about that, and talk about how many businesses across Nova Scotia have taken advantage of that and worked with you, and seen how they find that beneficial?

STEPHEN MACDONALD: What I'll talk about are those companies that are working in the energy efficiency sector as opposed to businesses who have taken advantage

of efficiency programs and benefited from lower energy costs, which I'd be happy to speak to as well. Sure.

As part of our work through Efficiency Nova Scotia, we have something called the Preferred Partner network, a network of about 300 companies located across the province. This is the stat I used earlier in my remarks, that around 50 per cent of those companies are located outside of HRM. They employ approximately 2,600 people directly. If you go to our website, you can search the partner database by different function, whether it's electrician or heat pump installer, do installation, engineering, architecture, all the various jobs that are involved in energy efficiency.

That network and all the companies that provide services to those companies in delivering energy efficiency work are critical to the types of results and impact that this province is having with respect to energy efficiency. As part of the efficiency scorecard, I talk about some of the impacts and savings. Nova Scotians have saved well over a billion dollars because of energy efficiency. It wouldn't be possible without these companies, and it wouldn't be possible without their work.

The commitments made in the climate plan, the commitments made in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, investments made by both the federal government and the provincial government - those investments, those commitments, provide some certainty to the industry that energy efficiency is here for the long term. I'm sure Mr. Skinner can talk about some of the work that's being done on helping people transition to this industry, creating exciting new jobs. But it's really that group of companies that deliver the services and really have the impact and are there for Nova Scotians.

THE CHAIR: MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: Before becoming an MLA, I was in business for most of my career. We'd often have marketing plans, strategic plans, operations plans - any kind of plan. Going back to this new fund that again is theoretical, not yet in place, and doesn't have a lot of detail, are you creating a strategic plan? Are there a document and a plan to follow as we make this transition? If so, could we see it?

THE CHAIR: Who is that directed to?

CARMAN KERR: Deputy Minister MacEachern.

LORA MACEACHERN: Our climate action plan is our strategic direction. That is our five-year plan, just released. That is our focus going forward. Of course, the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act is overarching. The remaining funds that are in the Green Fund, as we wind down cap and trade - and the focus of the

climate action fund when it's fully in place in 2024 - will be about supporting the actions that are set out in the climate action plan.

THE CHAIR: MLA LeBlanc.

RONNIE LEBLANC: The Green Fund was collected through the Nova Scotia cap and trade auctions, and the Green Fund took that money collected from the cap and trade and invested it in green sustainable carbon-reducing programs. It meant that it was the highest emitters that were paying for those programs.

We heard a number of times this morning that one of the new changes to the new fund is that the Treasury Board can allocate funds to the new program. Is that maybe an admission that the Output-Based Pricing System won't generate enough revenue to fund all the programs as it is? I don't know if you could elaborate on that.

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm happy to start off, and maybe the associate deputy minister may have some points to add to this.

Certainly no concerns about the ability to fund our commitments on climate action. The fund is there. It provides for flexibility as to what goes into the fund. Government has made a strong commitment to this climate action plan. We know that it will take resources to carry it out, but it's important work. We feel that the commitment and the support to see it through - we don't have any concerns. We'll be able to continue, expand, and focus on the important work that's required on climate action.

JASON HOLLETT: Deputy Minister MacEachern really did a good job of answering the question in a broader sense. I would just add that government has also invested in the past year additional funds into action on climate change that did not come from the Green Fund or other sources.

The \$140 million that was announced in December for the heat pump program and energy efficiency programs was not from the Green Fund. In December 2021, there was also \$57 million invested in energy efficiency programs as well that did not come from the Green Fund. I think that that demonstrates an awareness and an interest in the need for funding that comes from multiple sources to address it.

Also, to work with partners at other levels of government and in the private sector as well to make sure that we're leveraging funds as much as we can, because the scope and the scale of the problem is so large. It really involves everybody coming together to work on it.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.



GARY BURRILL: Just thinking more about the program we were just talking about, the heat pump program - I wanted to ask this of you, Mr. MacDonald. I'm assuming there is probably quite a marked uptick in people making applications now for home energy audits, to kind of get through the door to this new program. I'm wondering where EfficiencyOne is with helping people navigate that application process.

Applying online is not for everybody, and I'm thinking about some of the government's programs after Hurricane Fiona. In the constituency I serve, senior groups and community organizations brought people together to help people make online applications because a lot of those for whom the programs were intended in fact didn't have super facility in doing that.

At EfficiencyOne, are you giving any thought to those kinds of partnerships with seniors' groups or community groups to help people make the actual application process?

STEPHEN MACDONALD: That's an excellent point. Admittedly, we haven't approached or had discussions with senior groups or community groups about helping individuals through the application process, but we are constantly trying to make improvements to that process.

We have had some feedback over the years, and more recently, as more funding has gone into programs and programs have expanded, there is such demand that people need help in completing the applications. We've added some resources on our end in terms of more staff to be able to answer calls, to help people through the application process.

For Nova Scotians who visit our website, the 1-800 number is very prominent there. We encourage people to call if they have challenges with the application process. I'm aware of some businesses that have started up to help people navigate different funding sources, of which EfficiencyOne would be one, but I really do like your suggestion of community groups and seniors' groups, so I'm going to take note of that as well. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I'm not going to allow another follow-up. I'm still trying to balance this out. MLA Lachance, I did have you on the list right now, as your previous follow-up.

LISA LACHANCE: I think I might change topics, but just to keep talking about the efficiency applications and that sort of thing, I'm wondering if you can talk about what you know in terms of the wait-list, and what support is being provided on the other side to preferred partners, unless you're thinking to help them maintain the wait-lists?

I know that when we tried to get on some wait-lists to get some assessments, and people were basically saying, I'm not doing that. I'm so overwhelmed, I'm not taking your name, I'm not taking your number. Call back in six months, maybe, and good luck finding someone. I'm not easily dissuaded so that's fine, but for others, that might be hard.

I'm just wondering, also, helping people apply, but helping your suppliers and what the wait times are right now.

STEPHEN MACDONALD: I spoke a little bit about some of the work we're doing on helping people get through the application process. We are definitely seeing increases in demand for the programs as a result of increased funding, but, also, higher energy costs.

We have a number of partners we work with on helping to increase capacity in the system, if you will. In anticipation of potential funding coming through, we work very closely with our partners to help them start to build capacity. They have relationships with their suppliers. In the case of heat pumps, they can start to make orders in advance, if you will, start to look at potential hirings on the labour side of things.

I mentioned we've added some staff ourselves to help people navigate through the process. We have a large procurement out now for partners for the HomeWarming service, so we need more partners operating in this space. We're very confident that this increased demand will lead to more activity in the sector and be able to meet that supply, but we certainly do our best to try and manage wait-lists and manage wait times as well.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: I'm going back to the department again. My question is going to focus on financial priorities. You folks have a lot of initiatives in front of you with a lot of things that have been tasked for you to do: reducing the greenhouse gases, protecting our natural resources, increasing efficiency, all of those things that encompass all the plans and details in EGCCRA.

Deputy Minister MacEachern, how do you and your team decide on where the financial priorities are going to match up with the priorities that are written in the plans?

LORA MACEACHERN: We do have a number of priorities for sure, but we do feel, with the new climate plan, that that has been a really strong priority-setter for us. As you probably know, that plan was established based on extensive consultation that was done across the province.

Actually, Clean Foundation was the lead for us on that, and that set the foundation for the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act and now the climate plan. It's also based on the risk assessment and our engagement with many along the way. That really has set our priorities.

With that goes our focus in terms of the financing. I've mentioned a few times today about the government using the new climate change fund in order to be able to fund our work under the climate plan. Just to mention a couple of things that are early focuses, I think just right after the climate plan was announced was that significant investment that

was referred to, the \$140 million on energy efficiency programming. The focus on energy efficiency programming is really a big priority, because we know the multiple benefits that it provides.

[2:15 p.m.]

I also didn't get a chance to mention this yet, so I'll do so now. We're really happy about this work, and it's the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund. It's referred to in the legislation and also referred to as an action in the plan. It's a \$15 million investment toward working as the administrator of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities on that, and within the next short period of time, there will be some decisions on the applications that came forward from communities all across the province for things that they can do in the community that address their specific needs around climate action.

We've had many applications. There's an evaluation committee that's doing their work right now, and we'll know more in the coming times. That was the first round of applications. There will be a second round of applications, but it's a really exciting piece of work and really can have the potential to really impact the everyday individual in communities all across the province. That's a priority for us.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: We've heard a little bit about the Minister's Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity, and Mr. Skinner, I understand you're the Chair of that committee. Could you just take a second and give us your thoughts on the role of that committee and the value you see it giving government and Nova Scotians in general, just to give a little bit about the work of that committee?

SCOTT SKINNER: The Round Table has existed for quite a while now. As Deputy Minister MacEachern said, it's been reinvigorated in the last little while as EGCCRA has made it through legislation. It's a group of a broad cross-section of people who are either representing industry or experts in particular areas of climate change. We've set up a pretty rigorous structure for a volunteer committee at this point. We meet five times a year, which is a significant contribution of time for a lot of people, but they're all very engaged.

Minister Halman has also been ever-present at these meetings, and it's a combination of presentations by the department to set the education level of what's happening. Then there's always time for discussion, for feedback, where the members can provide their thoughts and suggestions that maybe the senior members of the department or Minister Halman might want to take into consideration.

We move into this year, and it will be the second year with annual reporting. The Round Table members will be quite involved in that, reviewing things before they make it outside the department and looking to the format and the information that's conveyed. It's

really in its best form: a two-way conversation between the minister and the senior staff, and the members of the Round Table so that we can collectively come to good decisions. As I think we've all mentioned, I think we have a pretty good idea of the main things we need to do and the main things we need to do more of, but the details are going to require us to work together in the longer run.

Another comment I'll make here is one you'll often hear from Minister Halman or from any of us here: this requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. You can imply that to mean all across government, but for me it means all across society. That's very much going to include the private sector, whether that's participating in energy efficiency programs, or many of the other sectors of the economy which are seeing opportunities now, whether that's bioeconomy, fisheries, agriculture, renewables energy generation. A lot of the things that will happen in the years ahead are going to happen in new forms of partnership that we haven't really seen in the climate and renewables space.

I see an effectively functioning Round Table as part of that process of exchange of information and ideas. To date I'm very happy with how it's worked for both sides of the table, both government and the members.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I'm going to go to Mr. Skinner again. I've seen and read where regular combustion vehicles are responsible for nearly a third of the GHG carbon emissions. I understand Clean Foundation offers some assistance in helping drivers access electric vehicles. I have to take a go at my favourite punching bag here: the fact that the carbon tax is going to unfairly impact rural residents who I represent.

I'm wondering if you could give us a little bit on what program is available to support electric vehicles. There's no mass transit in Bass River, and that's where I choose to live. Have you ever given any thought to a little bit of a lift-up for rural folks who are interested in buying electric vehicles, given that they certainly have to travel more, they have to travel to work, to doctor's appointments, or whatever? If you could just give us a little update on that or conversation on that.

SCOTT SKINNER: I'll try to take a little tour through this, because it's a complex issue at this point, especially when you get outside of the cities. I think if we look at the reality of reducing emissions in the transportation sector, it doesn't really work out very easily if we just trade in internal combustion engine vehicles for EVs, one for one over the course of time. We really need to do a bunch of things all at once, which is participate in the market transformation around vehicles for sure, but look at the real transportation needs of our communities in cities and in rural areas. This is an issue that won't go away just because it's hard.

On the rebates that we offer today, they're matched up with the federal government rebates, so it's pretty easy for the dealerships and customers to access them, and they provide a pretty decent bump for new vehicles and also for used as well. I think where we are today is we have a real issue around supply. Demand has far outstripped supply on electric vehicles in the region right now. I think there are somewhere over 800 vehicles that purchasers have received a rebate for so far through our program. There are a lot of people who remain on wait-lists.

We're relying on factors outside of our control in our region about getting that supply, but I'm hopeful that we're going to see that, and we see lots of really big investments happening at the federal level and the international level around industrial policies moving in this direction.

One of the things that has been really surprising for me - and I mentioned this in my opening comments - is the popularity of e-bikes, which in their best form for climate change action would allow people to replace a vehicle - maybe if they have two in a family, they would replace one of them with an e-bike, and they can get around and also get a little bit of exercise.

Very interesting to me is when we looked at the average age of people who are availing themselves of the rebate, it's actually quite higher than I expected. Last time I checked, it was 57, which to me is kind of heartwarming. It's also been a nice economic driver for small bike shops around the province. It's brought a lot of people through their doors and it's allowed a lot of people to rediscover the pleasure of biking, which many will tell you is the most happiness-inducing way to commute to work.

The question of EV adoption is a multifaceted one, and it's inextricably linked with the availability of public charging. Most people who own electric vehicles do most of their charging at home, but when you travel longer distances, those options need to be in place. We're currently working with the Province and the federal government to install a fair number of Level 2 charging stations, and I think you'll see some options coming from the feds and the Province to support Level 3s. But we need a whole lot more - that is evident - if we're going to reach the targets that are set out in EGCCRA, which is 30 per cent of new car sales by 2030. The federal government targets are even much higher than that.

All I'll say is that I don't have the full answers for you on this, but I hear you. Electric vehicles at this point aren't always a good option for everybody, so we have to look at other modes of transportation, whether they be public or active.

THE CHAIR: MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: Back to the Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth document, I'm just looking in Appendix A, No. 4. It talks about an aquaculture climate change information hub, and down below, in No. 9, it talks about supporting the aquaculture sector.

The member for Clare - also our critic for Fisheries and Aquaculture - and I visited a land-based aquaculture business, Hamilton's Fish Farm. I just wondered if you could elaborate on the climate change fund - if there is any support for those businesses like Hamilton's.

Sorry - that's to the deputy minister or the associate deputy minister.

JASON HOLLETT: I think the focus of the climate change plan, as the deputy minister mentioned before, needs to include support for many sectors across the province. Fisheries and aquaculture obviously is a really important one here for us in the province. We work closely with our partners at the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture for the actions and the commitments that are implemented in this plan.

Two of the things they brought to us were, number one, making sure that we have the data and the information on the impacts of climate change so that that industry can prepare for what we will be seeing in the future. That's really important for them and for companies, businesses, and individuals who work in that sector to be able to prepare for and adjust for those changes that come. I think that's number one.

Number two is to make adjustments to their operations to deal with things that focus on affordability and cost savings, quite frankly, with businesses. Action No. 9 really talks about getting into energy efficiency programs for plants, producers, and processors to make sure that they are reducing their consumption as much as they can. That helps reduce costs and makes their businesses much more viable in the longer term and even gets into things like producing their own energy on site.

It even bleeds over into conversations that we have on the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act on a circular economy where we're taking a look at what wastes are happening in our industries as well and how we can reinsert that back into our economy to make sure that we are making sustainable use of all the facets of our industries.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: This is a question for Mr. MacDonald. We've been talking about energy upgrades and energy efficiency. Some experts have said that to get to our 2030 greenhouse gas reduction targets - and certainly to get to the 2050 goals - basically every commercial and residential building in the province needs some type of retrofitting.

I'm wondering if you can talk about what you see the next 10 to 20 years looking like in terms of retrofitting, where the potential gaps or tricky points are, and are we on track to get where we need to be?

[2:30 p.m.]

STEPHEN MACDONALD: I'm very happy to talk about this subject; it's a very important one. To answer the last part of your question first, I do think we're on track. It will take a concentrated effort to remain on track, to hit the goal of net zero by 2050. I do agree with your statement that retrofits for almost every building - whether it's a home or commercial building - need to take place in order for the Province to hit its climate goals and to hit the climate goals affordably for all Nova Scotians.

When I think about the work that needs to be done, we need to have a focus on building envelope first. Building envelope means the insulation of a building - the airtightness of a building, the air exchange of a building is critically important - and then focus on mechanical systems and ensuring that building heating and cooling is done by not using fossil fuels, whether that's transitioning buildings off of oil or transitioning to electricity and in concert ensuring the electricity system is being transitioned to renewables itself, so electricity that's being generated is based on renewable resources.

Building envelope, mechanical systems, and then looking at some of the more harder-to-reach areas in buildings themselves, getting into things that in common vernacular are deep energy retrofits. There are retrofits that save over 50 per cent of a building's energy usage. They are more expensive, more time-consuming, more costly, but with that comes tremendous savings to the building owner, the tenant, the homeowner, if you will.

We do have a number of pilots under way looking at deep energy retrofits. It will take time to integrate deep energy retrofits into our suite of programs. When I look over the next five, 10, or 15 years, it's transitioning from the types of retrofits we do now to more deeper energy retrofits on buildings.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Deputy Minister MacEachern, you mentioned in your opening remarks about the significance of the designation of Owls Head Provincial Park - it was in one of your opening slides. I want to ask about the in-many-ways parallel situation with West Mabou Beach Provincial Park. Wouldn't the government be in a better position here to simply say that in Nova Scotia, we don't sell parks, that the present application proposal is not a proposal for a canoe and kayak franchise or a canteen - it's a golf course proposal that would fundamentally transform the whole situation of the park, and we don't entertain those kinds of proposals?

THE CHAIR: I question if your question is actually on topic, MLA Burrill. I really don't think it is, so I'm going to rule it - not even answer it. I'm sorry. Do you have another question that's on topic?

GARY BURRILL: You are ruling on my question as out of order?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I really don't think it's on topic. We have seven minutes left. Do you have a question on the topic?

GARY BURRILL: I would wish to point out that the matter was raised not by me, but by the opening presentation of the deputy minister. If you are in fact ruling my question out of order, I move that this ruling be not sustained by the committee.

THE CHAIR: Should the ruling of the Chair be sustained? To vote. No comments, we just vote to support the Chair.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Do you have another question, MLA Burrill? I'm giving you the opportunity to ask another question on topic.

GARY BURRILL: Thinking about your comments too about the environmental racism panel and the fact that there's been an appointment made to the panel, so we're moving in the direction of this being constituted. Would you be able to commit that when that panel gets constituted and is in operation, that the minutes of its proceedings will be made public and available?

LORA MACEACHERN: I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak a little bit more about that important piece of our Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. As you referenced, we are at the point where we've appointed Augy Jones to spend the next number of weeks until the end of February to work on some potential - some draft terms of reference for the work of that committee. We feel that that's a very important step. He'll be doing so in concert with communities and making sure the draft terms of reference is fulsome.

As you are no doubt aware, an element of many terms of reference is how the panel does their work. That would include considerations of whether those minutes that might be a part of that work are made available. At this point, I would say that we'll wait and receive the recommendations of Mr. Jones on that panel and how he recommends they do their work, and reserve further comment until that time.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: I know we're running out of time. I know that you folks do an incredible amount of work, and I know you're empowering communities to do it. I'm



just wondering, from Mr. MacDonald or Mr. Skinner: Do you have any stories about a business or an individual that is really making a difference in what you're doing?

STEPHEN MACDONALD: I'd be happy to provide a couple of examples. A long time partner of ours is Trinity Energy Group, located in Stellarton. They started in this area around 2006, I think - my dates might be a little bit off. Two high school friends from rural Nova Scotia decided that they wanted to get in the business of insulation or whatnot. They've participated in efficiency programs and been a partner of ours for many years.

They've grown to a few hundred employees, then expanded into New Brunswick, expanded into the commercial sector. They do incredible work. What I really find very powerful about their story is that they come from a part of the province where I'm from where many young people would have to traditionally go out west to find work. They can stay in their community and find jobs.

What we often hear about, though, are stories from customers. I mentioned the HomeWarming program and how it helps low-income Nova Scotians. We'll often get letters or other comments from families who have been helped by Trinity and the two gentlemen I mentioned, Dwaine MacDonald and Rodney Misener. They'll name them personally, and they're making such a difference in their community. They sponsor so many things, rugby teams, volunteer at the local fire hall, for example. It's an amazing, amazing story, and they're doing incredible work.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: Just quickly, I want to give a big shout-out to communities. I represent the town of Berwick. They do a lot of great things. They're very progressive in energy and alternatives and renewables. I had the minister up to see a 12-acre solar farm that we hope to see online providing power sometime maybe this year.

You had mentioned some of the supports to communities, municipal units. Could you maybe talk about how communities like Berwick, and maybe other communities - elaborate on some of those things you talk about in that very short amount of time?

THE CHAIR: Associate Deputy Minister Hollett, you have less than one minute.

JASON HOLLETT: I'll talk fast. I would say for communities, we've had strong partnerships with municipalities for many years, working on climate change in many respects. They're on the front line of the impacts of climate change, and with a lot of the opportunities as well. A lot of the things we talk about in terms of transportation is focused on communities and are run out of communities and municipalities.

I think in recognition of that, the creation of the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund is really important. It's \$15 million that's accessible to community groups

to deal with their priorities, whether that be adaptation, or GHG reductions, or transportation, or whatever it is that they want to move forward to help their communities.

As the deputy minister said, we had really strong interests in this in December. We're really excited to see what comes out of that in terms of supports that we can get . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, please. The time for questioning has come to an end. I would like to invite any witnesses who have some closing comments - just brief comments if you'd like to make.

LORA MACEACHERN: I'll just make a very brief comment, just to leave with the parting note that I feel that Nova Scotians can be really pleased with the leadership that's being shown in Nova Scotia on climate change. That's in part because of the great work of government, great work at the department, and great work of so many other people in communities, our delivery partners here, and many others.

I'll just leave with that parting comment. Thank you so much for spending the time on this issue with us today. We really appreciate the time that you've taken.

STEPHEN MACDONALD: Just very quickly to thank the committee for allowing me to appear today and for some of the suggestions on how to make programs better - I'm going to follow up on a number of them. Finally, I want to thank all MLAs. Your offices have always been such an important advocate for efficiency programs and an outlet as well, so thank you to members of the committee, but to all MLAs as well.

SCOTT SKINNER: I'd like to thank everybody for inviting me to be here today and bringing a topic like this for discussion. MLA Harrison, when you asked for good stories, my mind fills with names of people whom I'm inspired by all around the province who continue to work on these issues every day and are working hard to create resilient, safe, and prosperous communities all around the province.

You won't have to walk very far around your constituency to find one of them these days, and increasingly, the youth in our province are very interested in being part of this. Again, I'm very happy we have the climate change plan and EGCCRA legislation, and I'm very optimistic for the days ahead.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for appearing. Obviously, you had our attention the whole time. I can't believe two hours have passed that quickly. We've had lots of questions for you. I think we could take you for two days, to be honest with you, so I really appreciate you coming in and joining us.

We'll take a three-minute recess.

[2:43 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:46 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the meeting back into session. We'll move into committee business now.

We had follow-up information sent by Mr. Gordon Stevens from Build Nova Scotia in response to a request made at the November 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting. This information was sent to us members on January 12<sup>th</sup> and again yesterday. Is there any discussion on the information? Seeing nothing, moving on.

We had follow-up information sent from Deputy Minister Farmer of the Department of Economic Development in response to a request for information made at the November 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting as well. It was sent to us on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Is there any discussion on that?

MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: Is this the one with my name in it, I guess? The cell gap study? Is that the one we're referring to?

THE CHAIR: That was the first one.

CARMAN KERR: The first one, sorry.

THE CHAIR: My understanding is that it's a draft.

This one here we're talking about was the funding. No comments? We'll move on.

Our next meeting is scheduled for February 28<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. here at One Government Place again.

If there is no further business, we are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:48 p.m.]