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COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Legislative Chamber

Emergency Management Office

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Public Accounts Committee

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Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Terry Spicer
Deputy Auditor General

WITNESSES

Department of Municipal Affairs

Ms. Kelliann Dean, Deputy Minister
Mr. Andrew Lathem, Executive Director, Emergency Management Office
Mr. Paul Mason, Director of Emergency Services, Emergency Management Office



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2017

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Iain Rankin

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. This morning we have with us the Emergency Management Office. We will start with introductions, but just a quick reminder for everyone to make sure your phone is on silent.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Dean, you can now proceed with your opening comments.

MS. KELLIANN DEAN: Good morning everybody. Thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning and speak of the important work being done by the Emergency Management Office, or EMO as we refer to it. As you know, joining me today are Andy Lathem, Executive Director, and Paul Mason, the Director of Emergency Services.

Andy joined EMO in 2005 after a 30-year career with the RCMP so I know we're in good hands. Paul has worked with the province since 2007, following 10 years in the banking and insurance industries.

The Emergency Management Office has been in place in our province in one form or another since the 1950s. In fact, the Civil Defence Act created the first version of EMO, called Nova Scotia Civil Defence in 1954. This organization was renamed the Emergency Measures Organization Nova Scotia in 1961, and in 1990 the current Emergency Measures Act was proclaimed.

The mandate of EMO is to enhance Nova Scotians' safety and well-being through innovative, collaborative, and integrated emergency planning and response. Today EMO has 26 staff and a budget of \$7.4 million. This includes the 911 systems budget of \$4.7 million and \$2.7 million for emergency management.

As of April 2014, responsibility for EMO moved to the Department of Municipal Affairs. Over the past 20 years EMO has coordinated the response for 16 major disasters, including the Cape Breton flood, Swissair, Hurricane Juan, and White Juan.

This morning I'll share the four core functions of Emergency Management and how EMO administers these functions. After that I'd be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The four pillars of Emergency Management are mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. In terms of mitigation, here in Nova Scotia we help administer programs like the federal National Disaster Mitigation Program and the provincial Flood Risk Infrastructure Investment Program. These initiatives provide communities with funding to help increase resiliency in the event of a disaster.

Another key piece of EMO's work involves helping municipalities plan and prepare for an emergency. EMO employs four emergency management planning officers outside of Halifax, each of whom is responsible for various regions in our province. They are located in Truro, Sydney, New Minas, and Lunenburg. EMO ensures that each municipality in our province has an up-to-date emergency management plan.

In addition to a plan, the Emergency Management Act requires that all municipalities have an emergency management coordinator, an emergency management committee, and an emergency management bylaw.

Of course, any good plan involves training, and EMO develops and delivers a variety of emergency management training programs throughout our province. EMO and other provincial government departments and outside organizations participate annually in simulated disaster exercises. These exercises help us to improve our response in the event of an actual emergency.

In advance of a weather event or following a disaster, EMO activates what is called the Provincial Coordination Centre. This centre is co-located with HRM emergency planning and Public Safety Canada, and allows representatives from all necessary groups to come together during an emergency to manage resources and responses. For example,

this centre was activated during the mid-February snowstorm which saw some areas of our province get over 50 centimetres of snow.

Responding to emergency situations entails that EMO builds good relationships with partners and stakeholders. To that end, EMO maintains connections with critical infrastructure partners, including the military, the federal government, Nova Scotia Power, Eastlink, Bell Aliant, the fuel industry, and the Retail Council of Canada. For example, last Fall when many wells ran dry in southwest Nova Scotia, municipalities asked for help accessing drinking water. So, EMO reached out to the Retail Council of Canada and Labatt Breweries of Canada, and shipments of donated and purchased water were delivered to the region within a couple of days.

EMO also arranged for use of a water tanker and access to provincial parks and schools for showers and water. This was all possible because of our relationships with partners inside and outside government.

EMO also plays an important role supporting recovery efforts following disasters. EMO is responsible for administering the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements. This agreement is a shared program between the federal government, provinces, and territories. It is for insurable losses from disasters and can only be enacted when damages exceed \$3 million for Nova Scotia. This is a rigorously audited program and the province must follow guidelines on the eligibility of claims so it can recoup federal funds.

I'm sure that many in this room are familiar with the CBRM Thanksgiving Day flood and the damage to people's homes and belongings, which resulted from this natural disaster. Currently, EMO continues to process disaster financial assistance claims related to the flood. So far we have received more than 1,100 applications and have issued 413 payments, totalling \$6.6 million.

Another key aspect of EMO's work involves managing the 911 system. As we all know, 911 is the number people call when we're faced with an emergency situation. Approximately 230,000 calls to 911 are processed in Nova Scotia every year.

Finally, EMO coordinates our province's Ground Search and Rescue programs and administers the Alert Ready system for Nova Scotia. Alert Ready is designed to deliver critical and potentially life-saving alerts to Canadians through television and radio, and was developed in partnership with the federal, provincial, and territorial emergency management officials, Environment Canada, and the broadcast industry.

I'll be happy to expand further on the Emergency Management Office and activities, and I would like to say that I'm proud to be associated with the important work done by this very dedicated group of people. Thank you for this opportunity and I welcome your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Dean. We will begin with Mr. Houston of the PC caucus with 20 minutes of questions.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for the introductory comments. As somebody from a finance background, it seemed like your colleague from the RCMP background got more of a shout-out than your colleague with a finance background. (Laughter)

MS. DEAN: We're in really good hands there too.

MR. HOUSTON: Just an observation. In terms of the Cape Breton funds, I want to focus on those specifically, but before I do, how many times has the federal disaster recovery program actually been enacted in the last, say, 10 years?

MS. DEAN: Well I believe that we have operated the Disaster Financial Assistance Program 16 times in response to 16 disasters. So again, it's dependent on the threshold and the magnitude of . . .

MR. HOUSTON: So, 16 applications.

MS. DEAN: Yes.

MR. HOUSTON: Did they all meet the threshold?

MS. DEAN: Yes, they did. For example, it dates back to 1999 - Tropical Storm Harvey. I'm not sure if you remember that. There was a flood in 2000 in Cape Breton. Hurricane Juan of course - people will remember that - was 2003, so the DFA was enacted then. There was another blizzard in 2004. There was flooding on the South Shore in 2005. Tropical Storm Noel in 2007. There was a Labour Day flood in 2008. Meat Cove floods in 2010. So, there were a number of floods, and again bringing us up to current day with the Thanksgiving Day flood in Cape Breton - so 16 times.

MR. HOUSTON: So, the last one prior to the Thanksgiving Day floods was 2010?

MS. DEAN: Actually, 2014 - there was flooding December 9th to 12th.

MR. HOUSTON: Where was that?

MS. DEAN: I believe that was Truro.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the Cape Breton floods, how many homes have been designated by EMO as uninhabitable? Is that the 1,100 you referred to? You referred to 1,100 claims, I guess, in your opening comments.

MS. DEAN: Maybe I can clarify. In the wake of the flood, CBRM would be the first responders on the ground looking at the damage. They determined that there were

approximately 18 homes that were deemed uninhabitable, so people needed to leave those premises immediately. There may have been other homes as well, but there has been focus on these ones because they were the most severely damaged during the flood.

The 1,100 claims represent a variety of experiences that people would have had from damage to homes, to businesses, to not-for-profit organizations because they are all eligible to apply under the DFAA. They would represent varying degrees of damage.

MR. HOUSTON: So in terms of the 18 uninhabitable homes, how many of those would have had their private insurance claims denied? Would all of them have had their private insurance denied?

MS. DEAN: I would back up a little bit. Every case is different, and we have to work with individual homeowners and their specific policies. The way the program works is that it looks at what insurance somebody would have had in place, and it also does an assessment of the damage and then looks at all of those factors together.

I'm not going to speak about individual homeowners and their insurance policies. What I will say is that there was an approach that we took to try to deal fairly with all of those homeowners and try to get them in the best position possible through the program.

MR. HOUSTON: Maybe I'll ask it another way. Those 18 homeowners specifically, are any of them still awaiting some form of compensation?

MS. DEAN: Yes, there are still some. The majority of them have been dealt with, and we're working through the process with them. There are a number whose claims have not been fully settled. What I will say, though, is that we had the ability to advance 50 per cent of the claim to ensure that people could at least get a start on rebuilding their lives and on ensuring that they could replace some of the contents of their home or, for those that were going to do repairs, to begin those repairs.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. Some of the 18 are still waiting for a full settlement. There were 1,100 claims in total, and 416 of them have been settled, so the vast majority of them have not been. I guess what I'm trying to understand is - we're five months past now. Is that a long time to sort these out?

MS. DEAN: I would say that it is not a long time to sort these out, and I'm going to get Andy to elaborate on this in a moment because he has had experience with these programs over the years. From what I have seen, this process does take time.

In fact, we responded more quickly this time, I think, than we ever have. Given the magnitude of the damage to people's homes, we wanted to make sure people knew there was going to be a program there in place to help them.

But the challenge is that we need information from insurance providers, and sometimes that takes time. Assessments have to be done of homes and contents. That information has to come in. The other piece is assessments of soil contamination to determine exactly what the true state is for particular homes and whether there's going to be a level of clean-up required. All of those elements take time to determine.

We were able to get all of that done by December in order to work with these homeowners, as an example. The other thing is that we are at the mercy of people taking the time to process their claims and send the information in to us.

Andy, perhaps you might want to elaborate on that.

MR. HOUSTON: Just as you do, is it a fact that the response has been quicker? Are you able to look back at, say, White Juan and compare the timelines for settlement?

MS. DEAN: I would say that the response to getting a DFA program in place has been quicker this time.

MR. HOUSTON: Getting it in place, but does that get it to people?

MS. DEAN: Again, it's dependent on the information coming in to us. But oftentimes, it's a month into a disaster before the Disaster Financial Assistance Program is announced. We had that announced within a week following the disaster that occurred in Sydney.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you want to comment on the speed versus prior ones? Is it a quicker response in terms of settlement of claims compared to White Juan? I guess that's the one that sticks out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lathem.

MR. ANDREW LATHEM: Each circumstance, as Deputy Dean spoke about, each one of those disasters is unique. This is the first time that the province purchased residences as part of the disaster financial assistance. So that's a complicating factor

Another complicating factor in addressing each one of the claims is the private homeowner dealing with their own insurance. As the deputy spoke about, this is not a replacement for private insurance. What we did was, we hired appraisers on the ground and 10 extra folks to be out there and augmented our staff by five extra as well in order to process the claims quickly. The 18 - the majority of those claims have been settled for the folks who were out of their homes. The remaining issues are between the homeowners and their insurance. Once that is settled, then they'll be able to deal with us fully, but they know exactly what it is that they have to do, and that's what they're doing.

As far as the claims that are coming in, in the first week, when the program was first announced, what happens is, people aren't necessarily making their applications right away. They have to deal with their private insurance. There's a number of issues that as homeowners we all deal with. Then once they understand what they are covered for with their insurance, they may be going solely with their home insurance.

Just by the way I'm answering your question, you can see the complexities for each and every one of those cases. What we've done is streamline the process as much as we can. Then you continue to get applications, and we continued to get applications as recently as three weeks ago.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you have a sense as to the cost of the Cape Breton floods? What would be the dollar amount spent on the claims?

MS. DEAN: It's difficult to know because we're still doing an assessment of all the damage. There's infrastructure damage TIR is fixing. CBRM that has had to fix infrastructure as well. We estimate that it is in the \$15 million vicinity, but we don't know.

MR. HOUSTON: How much of that would the feds pay?

MS. DEAN: I'm going to get Andy to explain the scale, it's a graduated scale. The first \$3 million is I guess what you would call our deductible. The province would pay the first \$3 million. Then the federal government pays a portion, increasingly more of that portion the more the province spends.

MR. HOUSTON: So roughly, do you know? Let's say it was \$15 million. What would they pay?

MR. LATHEM: The federal government would pay 90 per cent, and the province would pay 10 per cent at that point.

MR. HOUSTON: Of the difference between \$3 million and \$15 million?

MR. LATHEM: That's right.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. Have we received anything from the federal government yet, or does that come?

MR. LATHEM: No, we haven't made the claim. As a matter of fact, I met with officials yesterday and discussed the claim. This is ongoing because there are still amounts from Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and from CBRM. It usually takes upwards of several months to collate all the data to make the submission for a claim. That has been the experience here in Nova Scotia and with my PT colleagues across Canada.

MR. HOUSTON: Just to give me some idea of perspective, have the feds paid on the 2014 Truro floods?

MR. LATHEM: No.

MR. HOUSTON: The one before that was in 2010 at Meat Cove. Have they paid on that?

MR. LATHEM: I think the ones that are outstanding are from Meat Cove forward. They are in audit or in process. So the submissions are made, and then there is a very rigorous audit process that the federal government undertakes. They will send auditors down here. They will review the files, they will take the information, and they will go back and assess that against their criteria. Then they will come back again, and we'll have the opportunity to have that discussion and clarify the issues they have raised. Then they will take that information, and it's a continuous process. There are several audits until we receive a payment.

MR. HOUSTON: To switch gears a little bit, in terms of this Emergency Services Provider Fund, is that something that falls under your area, Ms. Dean?

MS. DEAN: No. That is a Department of Municipal Affairs program. It's not administered by EMO. It's ministered within DMA.

MR. HOUSTON: I see the relevance, though, to EMO. When departments want to apply to the fund, they send that application to the fire marshal, but it was never really clear to me. Sometimes it's under the Department of Labour and Advanced Education budget or whatever, but now it's under the Department of Municipal Affairs budget, is it?

MS. DEAN: Yes.

MR. HOUSTON: The annual allotment for that fund is about \$500,000?

MS. DEAN: It is, yes. I don't have the details of that with me, but yes.

MR. HOUSTON: That fund used to be a lot bigger.

MS. DEAN: It did.

MR. HOUSTON: But it has been cut down. I know that volunteer firefighters and departments are kind of struggling around the province. Somebody told me there used to be almost 10,000 volunteer firefighters in Nova Scotia and now there are like 7,000.

When these disasters happen, they're the people we turn to most often first, the volunteer fire departments. I'm just wondering, what is the thought around that fund, and do you see the impact on the departments?

MS. DEAN: I was just checking. Again, I don't have the full details of the Emergency Services Provider Fund with me. What I do know is that we do our best to ensure that the needs of those local organizations are met. It provides protective equipment, and we try to do what we can with the resources that we have. Then in some instances, we are able to augment those resources if we have flexibility in other program areas.

I can't speak for the past. The program that we administered this year did reach out to a number of organizations and provided some critical equipment that had been requested. I would be happy to get you the information on that. I just don't have that with me right now.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, we can do that. My understanding of that fund is that it's \$20,000 per claim, I guess, the department makes, and they can only do it every three years. I was just curious about how that's done.

I guess I would ask a general question in terms of a disaster like that. The volunteer firefighters on the ground are a big part of the response, I'm sure. Could you say how much of a response? Are they 20 per cent? Obviously, a flood is different than a forest fire, of course, but they're pretty important to the process. Is that fair?

MS. DEAN: Oftentimes, they are the first responders. They are there, but everybody in an emergency situation has a role to play and makes a contribution depending on the response to the particular emergency.

As an example, they were critically important in providing support to the residents in Sydney by ensuring that shelters were open and providing support to families who were displaced in the early part of the flood response. They are a critical partner for us in the coordination of the EMO effort and the response effort.

MR. HOUSTON: In your opening comments, you mentioned municipalities having an EMO-designated person for local interaction and some training that's available. I'm just wondering about the changes to the Department of Health and Wellness and the Nova Scotia Health Authority. There used to be local management, let's call it, at each of the hospitals, and that really doesn't exist anymore. I'm wondering how EMO interacts with the local health care professionals to make sure that they're ready for a disaster. Does that come through the municipality's officer? How would you be reaching out and making sure that the hospitals and health care facilities are ready for a disaster as well?

MS. DEAN: I'm going to ask Andy to respond to that one.

MR. LATHEM: The Department of Health and Wellness has its own emergency coordination centre, and Mr. Russ Stuart heads that. They interact with all hospitals and health authorities. They are the central body that does that, the Departmental Emergency Planning Officers - we're an acronym-rich organization. Mr. Stuart is a DEPO, and if there is a situation such as a protracted power outage, which we've experienced, then Mr. Stewart

contacts us and we then provide whatever supports are required but they are the conduit for that contact throughout the health system.

The emergency management coordinators, the EMCs, are the municipal folks who are on the ground and each municipality has one. Those are also built into their plans so it becomes a multi-faceted response and that's where the coordination aspect of the Emergency Management Office comes into the equation.

MR. HOUSTON: I guess I'm running short on time for this round, Mr. Chairman. So, we have a designated person with the Health Authority who is coordinating through all the local . . .

MR. LATHEM: The Department of Health and Wellness, if you will, is the centre of that hub that reaches out through all the health authorities, so if there's an issue and they need assistance with it and they can't control it within the health system, they reach out to us and we provide whatever support services are required.

MR. HOUSTON: Have they had to reach out to you guys in recent times?

MR. LATHEM: The most recent one was when we had the protracted power outage and we brought in the generator through, I think it was Cat, and I think that was approximately four or five years ago. It was down for a period of time so we made the contacts through our local folks, had that generator brought over there along with the electrician who would hook it up to work with their electrical folks. As well, we coordinated that with Nova Scotia Power, who was doing the restoration. That's what it's about, the coordination.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, the time has expired. We'll move to Mr. Wilson of the NDP caucus.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for being here today. It's definitely a topic that is important to make sure that we're ready, as a province, to respond. Really, I think the first question, are we in a position to respond appropriately when disaster hits Nova Scotia in whatever aspect that might happen?

MS. DEAN: I guess what I would say is that we have the plans in place to respond. We have what we refer to as an all-hazards approach. The planning that takes place is all geared towards being able to respond to a variety of potential situations, so it's not just one very specific situation.

I think as well we have highly-trained individuals whose expertise is emergency management. The people who are with me today are critical in that effort. Part of the framework we operate under really ensures that all the key people who are responsible for

responding in the event of an emergency understand their roles and have their plans in place. It's very much about being prepared in order to then execute according to the plan when an emergency happens, an emergency situation.

I think the other thing I would say is that the different provincial governments and individuals themselves also have a role to play in being prepared to respond to an emergency. So, beginning with individuals, we try to get information into their hands early. We try to ensure they understand how to be prepared themselves in the event that they're without power for a period of 72 hours. There's public information to try to encourage awareness of the general public on their role and what they can do to enhance their own response.

Then it moves from different levels of government. Typically, the municipal government would be the first responder in a disaster situation, and the Emergency Management Act that we have in the province requires all municipalities to have a plan, to have an emergency management coordinator, to ensure that they have robust plans and that they are up to speed and trained.

Then at a provincial level we also have emergency management planning officers in place. They work very closely with municipalities to help them develop their plans and also to review them on a regular basis to ensure that they are updated. As an example, the municipalities completed climate action mitigation plans, and we made sure that elements of that were included in their emergency management plans.

Again, the other piece of this is relationships and good communication, so continuing to build those networks. As part of our efforts in the province, we ensure that we're establishing relationships with the municipalities, with the CAOs, with the emergency management coordinators, the first responders, and the regional staff so that everybody has an understanding of their role in the event of an emergency. Again, we would support municipal applications for funding.

So then at the federal level, depending on the severity of a situation, they are also prepared, under a similar framework, to engage with provinces or to engage where they're required. The Department of National Defence works closely with other federal departments and the provincial government.

The other piece I would say is that we engage regularly on broad scale exercises that involve different levels of government so that we can test how we're going to respond. That happens on a regular basis.

The other piece that I would add is on whether we are ready. We are preparing and planning and doing the best we can to ensure that we have the training and the resources in place. You can't always predict everything that could possibly happen. But there is another element in how these plans are developed that's really important for order when a disaster happens. Andy, maybe you can speak a little bit.

MR. DAVID WILSON: No, that's good. I'm good with that. I would agree that there is an importance to ensuring that those plans are in place. I know the professionals and volunteers around this province who respond on a daily basis to emergencies are there and willing to engage.

The one thing I didn't hear, which I think is still an important part of being ready and being prepared, is the financial component of it. We heard through questioning a few minutes ago that there is still pending funding coming from the federal government dating back to Meat Cove and the floods in Truro, which definitely concerns me. That concerns me if we have a federal government not willing to support the provinces in this country. Maybe I'll dive into that a little bit in a few minutes.

I looked at the EMO budget over the last five years or so. I would think that being prepared would reflect in the budgets. There seems to be inconsistency with the budgets. I'll go back to 2012-13, and I'll use forecasts because I guess forecasts would be the department trying to judge where we're going to be in that year. So forecast 2012-13 was \$8.7 million. The forecast for 2015-16 was \$6.6 million. Then in between those, we had \$7.1 million and \$7.3 million. The last number of years, we've seen an increase - I don't know if you'll agree with me that severe weather has played a major role in all the disasters that you've just mentioned earlier, dating back to Hurricane Juan. Would you agree with that, that severe weather is what's really driving the response our province has to disasters around the province?

MS. DEAN: I would say that we have certainly seen changes in weather patterns that are creating situations that maybe we haven't seen in the same magnitude in previous years.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Looking at the last number of years in the budget, would we not see a gradual increase to that budget? Are you confident in the budget that we have now for this year? I believe the estimate is \$6.5 million. I don't know what the forecast is for 2016-17. We'll find out maybe in a month or so, or less. Is that adequate? Is that part of being ready sufficient? If it's not, where do we need to go? How come the budget seems to be inconsistent over the last few years with the sheer number of disasters that we've witnessed?

MS. DEAN: I would say that the current budget we have is sufficient for the role that we play. We play a coordinating role, a leadership role, and a training role. In terms of the resources that we have to do that currently, EMO is staffed to carry out the role that it has. If its role were to change, then obviously, that's something that we would have to look at. But currently, where we are now, we have managed to do what we need to do.

I would also say that in response to certain situations, if we need additional resources, we'll find them. We will augment that budget as we need to, depending on what we might be responding to. For example, for the Cape Breton flood, we hired additional staff resources to be on hand to do inspections, to help people, and to process claims more

quickly. We're working within the budget that we have, but if we need additional resources, we find a way to accommodate that.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I understand that. That doesn't reflect the cost of the Cape Breton flood, for example. I think \$3 million has been spent so far. Where did that money come from? What department did that flow from?

MS. DEAN: That would be an Executive Council decision around additional resources in that magnitude.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know your budget reflects your department, your staff level. Do you have vacancies currently within EMO?

MS. DEAN: No, we do not.

MR. DAVID WILSON: That's good to hear. Do you need more resources? I know you can't get into the budget details. I try every year to get them from the department heads. But are there areas where you find that you need some support? Are you comfortable with the staffing level you have? Is there potentially going to be a request for more staffing?

MS. DEAN: I would say at this stage that we believe that the resources that we have are what we need to deliver on our mandate. If our mandate changes, that's a different situation.

MR. DAVID WILSON: That's fair. Last year, our caucus challenged the government, especially the Department of Environment and the minister, on the Climate Change division. I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but that division hasn't published an annual report since 2014, and there was some confusion about whether it still existed. We did hear from the minister more recently that it does in fact exist.

Since severe weather has played such a role in the disasters that your department had to respond to, has there been any work by EMO or Municipal Affairs with the Environment Minister and her department on the Climate Change division? Are you aware of it? Could you maybe give me some details on that specific engagement with that division?

MS. DEAN: Absolutely. One of the things that the province has committed to is the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change. I know the Departments of Environment and Energy have worked very closely in order to put together Nova Scotia's response and participation in that pan-Canadian framework. That's something that is very much on the provincial radar screen.

At the municipal level, in 2014, every municipality in Nova Scotia completed a municipal climate change adaptation plan. That allowed municipalities to think about the impact of climate change in their areas on their infrastructure and enabled them to think

about and describe how they would respond to climate change in their specific areas. We have these plans from 2014 for every municipality in Nova Scotia, which enable us to look at their key priority areas, the trends that they're seeing, and their biggest issues so that we can then work with them to address those. What I would say is that one of the most prevalent areas I guess of concern for municipalities is actually infrastructure stormwater, as an example.

Having this kind of information now also enables us to look at federal funding programs when they become available and say what the priority areas are for infrastructure development at the municipal level so that they can begin to get ahead of some of these challenges that they may be having from a climate change perspective.

I think we're one of the very few jurisdictions across the country where every municipality actually has a plan like that. So that information is very rich and we're still working with that and working with municipalities. But again, that information was also shared with EMO so that they could look at how to incorporate some of that in their emergency management planning as well. That's one very focused piece of information. We also . . .

MR. DAVID WILSON: I appreciate that. I appreciate the fact that requiring municipalities - there is a huge issue around infrastructure, we all know that. In my community flooding, because of the capacity, not able to cope with the capacity, especially from run-offs, we've seen floods quite often in the community. But the plan for the province - that was part of the criticism of the Climate Change division - where is that plan? There hasn't been a report in 2014.

So you're not aware that that division has a report on how the province itself - it's great that the municipality has a plan, but where is the province's plan? To what degree does the climate change, like adaptation, enter the work of EMO? Do you see it as part of ensuring that our provincial government has a plan, the Department of Environment needs to play a role if severe weather is impacting the things that your department responds to. Have you see the plan from the Climate Change division or are you confident that they're working in a direction that is appropriate and responds to current situations dealing with severe weather in Nova Scotia?

MS. DEAN: I wouldn't want to answer for my colleague in the Department of Environment or the Department of Energy. What I can say, though, is that many of the things you are speaking about are part of a broader pan-Canadian framework on climate change and that the province has developed its approach based on participation in the pan-Canadian framework.

The other piece I guess I would say is that all of the information we glean informs our path forward in EMO as well. Every time we experience a disaster we're learning something as we go along and we're adapting.

I guess the other piece I would say is that there is a proactive and a preventive element. There is a federal National Disaster Mitigation Program, for example, which allows you to look at vulnerable areas and propose ways to mitigate. We have an example where we're working with the Province of New Brunswick to look at the dykes and flood mitigation opportunities - let's say the Tantramar Marshes in that area. As an example, there are other ways that we're working with various partners - other governments and our own department - so Agriculture, Environment, ourselves, to say okay, where are certain key areas that we really need to focus on and to have some more data on so we can make recommendations about how to mitigate in the future.

MR. DAVID WILSON: To go back, I know you mentioned a couple of the federal programs. I wrote a couple of notes when I heard that there are still outstanding funds for the Meat Cove incident and the flood in Truro. Are you able to give us kind of a dollar figure on what is outstanding from the federal government? I don't know if you have that in front of you. If not, can you provide it to the committee?

MS. DEAN: We don't have that with us but we can.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Meat Cove was five years ago, seven years ago. To me that's a delay. Is it the fact that there was a federal government change that has delayed that or do we have some hardnose auditors who our Premier and our Prime Minister need to say come on, we need to help these communities and these provinces. To me I find it unacceptable that we're still waiting seven years for funding from the federal government on a program that is supposed to help provinces like ours when we have a disaster.

MS. DEAN: I guess what I would say is that the program - the reimbursement of the funding, we've already spent. So these communities have been helped - they have received support already and any urgent needs have been met, their infrastructure has been repaired. Essentially what the province is doing is waiting to be reimbursed for the money that it has already spent.

Having said that, the process is very, very rigorous. That is challenging, but we have received the money from previous programs and continue to work with the federal government to ensure we recoup what is eligible.

MR. DAVID WILSON: How is that on the province's books if it's outstanding? Maybe my colleague to my left, who is an accountant, could tell me - or maybe across the way. How are we booking that? Maybe the Auditor General can answer how that reflects in our books. I know they've been very critical to make sure that everything is represented, so I'm wondering if I could throw that out there for the last minute.

MS. DEAN: I am not an accountant either, but I would be happy to get you further information on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will move now to the Liberal caucus and Mr. Porter.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Thanks to the folks for being here this morning as witnesses. It's interesting that you mentioned I think four major incidents in your opening statement, three of which I was part of in a different life - Hurricane Juan, White Juan, and of course, Swissair. They all had their unfortunate uniqueness about them, yet being quite directly involved in those, things seemed to run quite smoothly. I think that's a true testament not only to EMO but to those people on the ground - the police, the paramedics, and the firefighters - who we don't recognize as often as we probably should.

From a regional perspective, we talked a little bit about it as well, the coordinators that you have, but there's more than just that coordinator. There's a lot of people coming together at that table. I sat on that group some years back as a municipal councillor as well, and recognize how much things have moved forward since then and maybe how we do business.

I think we talked a bit earlier about how we're always asking, are we ready for the next one, what does that look like, and do we improve things? I'm not sure "improve" is the right word because I'm not sure we need to improve in some areas a whole lot because things do seem to have a process that works fairly well. I'm not really sure that people understand directly what that process might be or how it all unfolds. I think that's the bigger question: when there is an incident, what does that look like? They are unique themselves, unfortunately. What's that roll-out plan? What does that look like?

I think when people think about EMO, they know there's this department, but what are the steps? What does that hierarchy look like? I don't think a lot of people really understand that. I'm not even sure some of the EMS providers - the volunteer firefighter on the ground knows, he or she has got a job to do, and they take orders from the captains and the chiefs and so on upward. Sometimes you hear them question, why do we do things this way or why do we do things that way?

I think if there's anything missing maybe - I'm not sure that it's even missing because as I said, we have good regional coordinators. In my area, Don Dignan is doing a great job out there and Paul Maynard and others, guys I know well who have been involved in the system from an EMS perspective for a very long time.

I guess I would ask this first: what's that breakdown? It doesn't just come in, and then all of a sudden we activate. I realize that as well. If you want to speak to that, that's fine. We are watching, and we know there's a storm coming, or there is an incident - maybe a Swissair - that you can't track, but there are many things you can track. Maybe from the things you can track and maybe from the things you can't track, how are they different? I'll give you some time to answer that, and it doesn't matter which one. Go ahead.

MS. DEAN: I would like to ask Andy to answer that.

MR. LATHAM: It depends on the situation, as you spoke about. At the EMC, the emergency management coordinator level of a municipality, they have the duty of first

response, and they have their plan. A situation occurs, and they are making their first response. As soon as they start to make their first response, they advise our emergency management planning officer, and we have one available on a 24/7 basis. After the regular close of work, we have an on-call emergency management planning officer.

If that situation occurs in an area of the province that that particular EMPO is not at when they receive the call, they call their colleague. Then they are monitoring that. If there are further supports required, that is when they will activate - within municipalities there are also REMOs, Regional Emergency Management Offices. The municipalities that are neighbouring each other also have signed agreements where they create an economy of scale, if you will. They will respond and share resources and assets to support each other in times of emergency.

Then if that situation escalates further, and there is a requirement for provincial resources and assets to come in to support the good folks at the coalface who are doing the work, then there will be a consideration for activation of the Provincial Coordination Centre. When the Provincial Coordination Centre is activated, the director of provincial operations and the manager of the coordination centre will be upstairs at our office. They will be calling in the folks at the departmental level, the DEPOs, the Departmental Emergency Planning Officers, to come in from the respective agencies. That's TIR, the Department of Community Services, Red Cross, Nova Scotia Power, Bell Aliant, whoever is required in that. Those are our touch points. As mentioned answering an earlier question, we can go to those people, and they reach out to their respective organizations.

As soon as we activate our coordination centre, because we are co-located, we advise Public Safety Canada. Public Safety Canada is the federal emergency management. At our office, we also have a military liaison officer who is embedded in our operations group. The military liaison officer receives all the messaging that our Departmental Emergency Planning Officers do, as well as our Emergency Management Planning Officers. They advise their chain of command of what's going on.

In addition, we are part of the International Emergency Management Group. That's a compact agreement that was signed by Atlantic Premiers and Eastern Seaboard Governors that allows us to share resources and assets in times of emergency.

In addition to that, staying within Canada, we have EMMA, which is the Emergency Management Mutual Aid agreement, which exists right across the country for all the provinces and territories. It can just keep escalating to whatever scope it is that is required to respond to that emergency situation so that we're providing the best level of service that we can to the people of Nova Scotia.

There are a number of steps there that I'm leaving out, but that is the escalation process that we would follow.

MR. PORTER: One of the examples you talked about, the interprovincial and Eastern Seaboard - last year's fires would be an example of that. Would you have been involved in that? I assume you were probably involved in that.

MR. LATHEM: We were involved in that. There are separate agreements that the Department of Natural Resources has on an international level, but we share resources. So during White Juan, there were resources that were brought in from Maine. They had a specific type of snow removal equipment that we didn't have access to that was brought in.

A small example is during the ice storm that occurred in New Brunswick. We were sharing generators with New Brunswick across the border. As soon as there is a situation that occurs, it is our agreement interprovincially - so it doesn't matter if it's the Alberta wildfires or if it's a situation here in the Maritimes - that we advise our colleagues that we're monitoring that, and if they need a resource or an asset to identify it, and that through the EMMA agreement, we will provide that. Then we back away from that until they make the call. You have to keep your eye on the ball. You can't be taking all these other calls for assistance. Those things are in place to do that. Those are just some examples of things that have occurred here through that escalation process.

MR. PORTER: Following an incident, regardless of what it is - I guess it probably doesn't matter - is there a debrief of sorts that your department works through that says this went well, this went well, this went well, oh, maybe we could do this a little differently next time?

MR. LATHEM: Absolutely. I will be the first to say that we are not perfect, but we strive for excellence all the time in all the work that we do.

I think that you've already spoken about the excellent work that first responders do across the province. The emergency management practitioners are very dedicated folks as well. They're not first responders; however, they're very dedicated to their profession.

When an incident occurs, we have what's called the hot-wash. Using the Cape Breton flood example, what we did was have an emergency management conference. We brought our emergency management planning officer to share those experiences of what was going on on the ground at the time, and then we will have a further operational debrief on that when everything is completed on the file.

We'll work with Cape Breton Regional Municipality. As a matter of fact, we were hosted by Chief Terry in Membertou, and Cape Breton Regional was there and Chief Leroy, who has the emergency management portfolio under his office, and we were there. We all discussed how we can work better collectively in the future, what their experience was, where their EM plans are. There are follow-up meetings at the operational level that are scheduled and ongoing.

We're always learning, always wanting to improve. We are always looking for constructive criticism so that that can be implemented into the plans.

Then we have an emergency management committee in each of the respective regions that brings all the municipal coordinators together on a regular basis. They review situations that have occurred and best practices so that they are sharing that information and keeping it updated. As well, we have an emergency management executive committee that meets quarterly. We bring all the information from the municipalities in, and we have a forum for discussion there and a review of particular incidents or challenges in those respective areas.

MR. PORTER: Are your REMO coordinators meeting with their municipal councils monthly? Is that consistent across the province? I know I've seen Don, as an example, at a municipal meeting. I never really thought about it too much, I guess, until now. Is this a monthly event?

MR. LATHEM: Each of the municipalities has a different meeting schedule, but the REMOs do report into the various councils that they provide service to.

MR. PORTER: We've had a fair bit of discussion about the events, a lot of them being weather, over the years. You talked earlier, Andy, about the amount of players, if you will - partners may be a better word - involved. The power company, the phone company, you name it, there's a very large group. I don't think people understand how broad it is sometimes.

A tabletop exercise, how often is that done? Do you pick a weather event and say okay, in Hants County - I'll just use my own county - in West Hants, there's going to be high tides? We're known for that. Is there some kind of exercise that you do on an annual, biannual, or regular basis to continually improve what you're doing?

MR. LATHEM: Each of the Emergency Management Planning Officers then works with the EMCs, and it can be a variety of exercising. It could be a table top. It could be an actual exercise where they're running through their TMR protocols. It could be testing of ham radios. It could be testing of SAT phones.

Upcoming here in the next six weeks is an exercise that's going to be international in scope, STAUNCH MAPLE, which the military is hosting. We are an active participant in that. In addition, ground search and rescue teams are out, and they're also training because they can be an aid to the civil authority in times of emergency as well. They're equipped with SAT phones. They have protocols and things that they're testing. So training, testing, and exercising is something that's ongoing all the time. We're always looking to learn from those as well.

MR. PORTER: Is that mandated or just a mindset?

MR. LATHAM: It's a mindset. It's what we do. You can have all the best plans - and that's why the plan is all-hazard. Historically, we have seen books of plans that have sat on the shelf. The all-hazard plan provides the agility to deal with whatever challenge confronts a municipality or whoever. So you plan it out, you test it through the exercise, and then you improve that plan constantly so that you're able to respond appropriately.

MR. PORTER: You talked a minute ago about ground search and rescue units. We have one. West Hants Ground Search and Rescue does a great job out there, and they share those resources. They don't just cover the area of West Hants. They go all over as needed. Where do they actually fit into what we're talking about this morning? They're part of REMO, I'm going to assume, across the board?

MR. LATHAM: There are 24 teams across the province, which represent approximately 1,000 volunteers. God love them all for the work that they do. They come out at all times of the day and night in whatever weather to provide that service to the agencies of a jurisdiction if there is a requirement. They aided in the Porters Lake fire when they were going out and assisting with evacuations. They have also been persons at flood barricades to aid civil authority. They're trained. They have a trunk mobile radio system, and they have SAT phones. They are definitely an integral part of the municipalities and for the province as well.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Chairman, a couple of minutes yet?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Porter, you still have about two minutes left.

MR. PORTER: Two quick questions if I can. I'm sure this doesn't make any difference, but just for clarity because it has been asked before. We have paid fire services, and we have volunteer fire services. I would assume there's no difference in how they react with EMO.

MR. LATHAM: I have never seen any difference. When you talk about first responders, whether it's ground search and rescue volunteers, or it's the first responders, when there is a situation that occurs, they put their intellect, ingenuity, and their hearts to it. Generally, you have to get out of their way because they're going forward to do the job and resolve whatever situation confronts them or challenges the people of Nova Scotia.

MR. PORTER: I just wanted to get that clarity on the record. Somebody asked me that back a while ago, and I said the exact same thing, that it makes no difference, having known a lot of them.

The only other quick question is, where are we going in the future? Where do you see EMO and this office and what we're doing? Is it fairly status quo? Where are we? It may be a tough question.

MS. DEAN: It is a tough question. I would say that I am very proud of the staff that we have, how they work, how they interact with the community, and how they interact with their partners. It's difficult to say where we're going in the future, but I think that the way we are set up now, the systems we have in place, the relationships that have been built, and the plans and their expertise in executing those plans put us in good stead for the future.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move back to the PC caucus and Mr. Houston for 14 minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: What happens when there is damage from a weather event, but the cost doesn't get up to the \$3 million threshold? Does that fall to the municipalities, or are those two separate things? The \$3 million triggers the federal, but there's still going to be provincial support if there's a weather event. I'm just wondering, at what point can a community expect some help?

MS. DEAN: I'll start, and then I may hand it over to Andy. In terms of being eligible for the federal programming, there's a \$3 million threshold. That would mean that the extent of damage that the province has paid for would be \$3 million.

Obviously, we may still incur more costs because it is cost-shared. But if there is something that happens, and it's below a \$3 million threshold, that doesn't mean that the province doesn't help or doesn't try to find ways to support or provide some support to communities.

We have the ability to look at situations and see if there are other ways to support or help. I know our colleagues in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal certainly step up when they can. So just because an event doesn't cost \$3 million doesn't mean that there isn't some level of support or some way to help.

MR. HOUSTON: When some event happens, and people around the province realize something has happened, does EMO kind of make a judgment that that's probably going to be more than \$3 million, we had better get activated here? Or how does that go?

MR. LATHEN: We don't activate based on a dollar situation. We activate based on the requirement, the need. So if an emergency management coordinator at the municipal level is saying they need assistance here, or I see that there's some potential here, then our Emergency Management Planning Officer is right there with them. As I had explained to your colleague across from you there, it then escalates through that to scope out whatever is required, as far as the operational response.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, just to give me some order of magnitude, in 20 years I think you said there were 16 federal claims. How many times would EMO have been activated provincially?

MR. LATHAM: We activated as recently as the recent blizzard. We were activated for 60 hours straight. Our coordination centre was open. We were there, and it was fully staffed during that time. After about 24 hours, I can tell you, it's like camping with none of the fun. You are there, and we're bringing folks in. We have our fridges and stoves, and we're . . .

MR. HOUSTON: And that's an example where the federal thing won't be triggered?

MR. LATHAM: It will not even come into consideration. The year of the big snow, two or three years ago, we were activated nine times in a series of less than two and a half months. Then we go for a period and not activate.

It depends. In the accounting world, there's a return on that investment - that's what we're looking at. If those folks are better used on the ground, then absolutely that's where they should be, and they are taking care of that. If there's a requirement, then there's never a question. We open up the coordination centre and bring in the resources and assets that are required.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, so it's probably more than we realize. In terms of the blizzard a couple of weeks ago, that was 60 hours of the warming centres and stuff. I wasn't actually sure if that was a big deal or not. This Legislature was even going to sit right up until the last minute but it turns out that it was a bigger deal, I guess.

Did EMO advise the Legislature not to sit on that fateful Monday, or would you have had any . . .

MR. LATHAM: We don't provide weather advice - that would be Environment Canada. The advice we would be providing would be from the first responders and I would provide that through situational awareness reports. Where that goes, I don't know.

MR. HOUSTON: So that blizzard wouldn't have triggered a federal claim but would there be some provincial assistance for HRM in dealing with that or other areas? I'm back to the thing that if it's not over \$3 million, is a municipality responsible for their own infrastructure? If there's a weather-related event in New Glasgow that wipes out the George Street bridge, that's inside the municipality.

Is there any precedent where the province has stepped up and said okay, we understand you had a weather-related event and damaged some of your infrastructure, we're going to help you with that. Is that something you recall happening, at least in your tenure?

MS. DEAN: I would have to look back on that. I guess to your point, not every disaster or every emergency situation is going to have a hard cost to it, in terms of damage or something that needs to be repaired through a program like the DFAs, as you indicated.

Municipalities generally will make the repairs they need to do to infrastructure as a matter of course if something happens to it. The challenge is when it gets into the magnitude of damage over \$3 million. I would say that generally they are able to handle things that happen as a matter of course to their own infrastructure. Certainly if there were unusual circumstances, we would look at how support could be provided.

I guess what I also want to highlight is that not every emergency situation is characterized by disaster or cost. Another really good example of the work of EMO was helping with the refugees who came here last year - to coordinate the clothing and donations which came in such huge magnitude that people didn't know what to do with them. They were able to put resources against that; you wouldn't call that a disaster.

It was a wonderful opportunity for the province, and EMO's expertise in relationships and coordination, in being able to access support, was instrumental in helping to settle them. It's circumstances that are beyond the norm, where they can step in with their expertise.

MR. HOUSTON: I just want to go back to the Cape Breton floods for a minute before I move on. I did have a couple of messages while this committee was going on that people from that area were saying, it's probably about setting expectations appropriately. We heard this morning that five months - this was all pretty quick, but I guess if you are a victim of that disaster and some elected person comes and puts their hand on your shoulder and says we're going to take care of you right away, you're not thinking that this is five months.

I don't know if there's a lesson to be learned from the response that is communicated to people because certainly I don't know how many of those 18 people still haven't had their claims settled for their homes but five months later they're probably thinking I didn't see this coming - in terms of, I'm going to be waiting for five months.

From EMO's perspective, it couldn't really happen any faster but from the public's perception maybe their expectation was different. I don't know if you have a comment on if the expectation was fairly set, or if there's a lesson to be learned in that sense.

MS. DEAN: I would say it is difficult and when people are in situations where they are losing their homes and they are losing - I mean it's incredible loss for individuals, most acutely those 18 people who couldn't go back to their homes. We certainly appreciate how difficult that circumstance was for them and many people in Nova Scotia who had to then endure repairs and try to get back to normal.

It is difficult if you think about having to rebuild a home or move from a home. The process definitely does take some time. What I would say is that the folks that we have here worked tirelessly to try to communicate with those individuals. We had dedicated people working with them trying to provide information in real time, explaining the

process, explaining exactly what was going to be happening, giving as much information as we had at the time to share with them.

MR. HOUSTON: It worked pretty well. You're probably going to go back and analyze in depth, but your gut says it works pretty well.

MS. DEAN: We moved at the speed that we could move. We tried to push the envelope wherever we could, recognizing that some of these things take time.

MR. HOUSTON: That's fair. I do want to talk about the Auditor General's Report from Fall 2016 where he talked about critical infrastructure. I want to ask if any progress has been made on the AG's recommendations towards identifying critical infrastructure.

MS. DEAN: The critical infrastructure audit - you will see that we agreed with all of the recommendations that the AG made. We've been starting to do what we can within the purview of EMO.

One of the recommendations did state that there was a desire for clarity around the department that had the responsibility for critical infrastructure. That is currently under consideration.

Having said that, we're certainly working to strengthen the list that we have around partners that are responsible for critical infrastructure because knowing who they are then helps us to contact the right people in the event that we have to respond to an emergency situation.

The other thing that we're doing is ensuring that we expand the list of our critical infrastructure partners to include all 10 sections of critical infrastructure. I think that was also an element in the AG's Report.

MR. HOUSTON: So as we sit here today, is the province fulfilling its requirements under the national strategy? We signed on to a national strategy. Would we say that, as we sit here today, the province is fulfilling its requirements under that strategy?

MS. DEAN: As we sit here today, I would say that there is increased interest in the national strategy. I think it was established in 2009, and at that time there had been varying levels of engagement on that nationally and provincially. Certainly there have been some further conversations at the provincial and national level about that work and how we can operationalize it more. We're doing our part in Nova Scotia to look at that and make sure that we are coordinating with all of the government departments that also hold some of this information as well.

MR. HOUSTON: Is there any correlation between our involvement with the national strategy and getting the claims paid? If we were fully compliant, would that kind of ease their audit requirements, or are they separate things?

MS. DEAN: No, those are separate.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you have a timeline as to when all of the AG's recommendations would be addressed?

MS. DEAN: We are working through that. I think we have some time to respond back on that. In the next reporting cycle, we'll be able to say where we are. But given the importance of critical infrastructure and the importance of being able to respond, this work is certainly a priority for us at this time.

MR. HOUSTON: I will just ask very specifically about the Canso Causeway. That was one of the things the Auditor General was concerned about. If something happens to the Canso Causeway, what is the response plan? We don't have a lot of time this morning, but is there a plan in place now? I don't think there was when the Auditor General did his review as to how we would respond to a disaster at the Canso Causeway. Is that something that has been resolved now?

MS. DEAN: My understanding there is that TIR has actually conducted a risk assessment there, is updating business continuity plans to reflect that particular issue, and is also looking at some other high risk infrastructure as a result of the recommendation that the Auditor General made.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will move to Mr. Wilson for 14 minutes.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I want to continue with the critical infrastructure. I think it is important, and I know how critical it is for residents when they go without during or after a disaster. The early days of my first being elected was of course Hurricane Juan. I think it was a month after I was elected. When your constituents go without power for days, they're concerned. We've seen that more recently with the ice storms in northern New Brunswick.

That kind of leads me to the infrastructure of our grid system. Somebody mentioned Nova Scotia Power over the last little while - the relationship of EMO, and the work of your department with them. Do you feel confident that Nova Scotia Power, for example, is able to respond in an appropriate manner? Are you concerned about the infrastructure of the grid system - the aging grid system that we have in Nova Scotia?

Did we dodge a huge bullet just recently with warmer temperatures in Nova Scotia, when we didn't see that cold snap that northern New Brunswick saw? Are you confident that we could weather - I guess "weather" is not the word to use. (Laughter) Could we respond appropriately in our infrastructure, especially that our electrical grid system could sustain a freeze like New Brunswick saw recently?

MS. DEAN: I would probably say that the state of the infrastructure and our ability to withstand the weather system like the effects in New Brunswick is probably a better question for Nova Scotia Power.

What I can say is that I think the working relationship that we have with Nova Scotia Power in times when we're activating the provincial coordination centre is excellent. I would say it has improved over the years - there is better communication and I think that Nova Scotia Power has also done a lot on its part to make sure that customers are kept apprised of outage information in a timely manner and also estimated restoration time.

Each time there is a weather event that's predicted, Nova Scotia Power and emergency management are working closely together, and they are in contact. Recently during one of the storms, probably before Christmas, Nova Scotia Power even reached out and was proactive in determining what might be possible in certain areas if the power outages were severe because they're looking at predictive models along with us. I would say that there's definitely an enhanced working relationship there, that they have made improvements on their side.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Are you confident that their plan is adequate, that in case of a disaster like New Brunswick saw, they can restore power in an appropriate timeline in Nova Scotia? Over the last 14 years, I have to say that I have seen great improvements with communications from Nova Scotia Power - alerts and keeping in contact with myself and my office - but there is always the next storm. Are you confident that they have the appropriate plan in place to hopefully restore power quickly if we do see an ice storm?

MS. DEAN: Again, I'm not going to speak for them. I would expect they have their business continuity plans in place as well. Andy, I'm not sure if you have a comment based on your working relationship with Nova Scotia Power.

MR. LATHAM: The relationship has improved immensely. To get into the operational response and just to provide you the depth of that, when we know that there's a weather event that's coming - I'm just going to pick an arbitrary event here. Let's say four days away, we have a big low pressure system that's coming, and it's going to be something that Environment Canada is advising us of.

One of our first contacts is with Nova Scotia Power - we start sharing information with them right away. Then as we lead up to that event and we're getting reports - we get very specific weather reports from Environment Canada - we share them with Nova Scotia Power and other critical infrastructure holders like Bell Aliant, et cetera. Then we put it out through the Everbridge system to ensure that every emergency management practitioner throughout Nova Scotia has that information as well so that they can make an informed decision.

Then when the decision is made that prior to the event impacting Nova Scotia, that we are going to activate the coordination centre, Nova Scotia Power sends a representative

from their coordination centre to our coordination centre and sits right in there during the event. When we were activated, Nova Scotia Power was switching personnel through there as well. We have, through them, direct contact to their operations centre and everything that's going on. So what their operators are seeing with the grid and what's going on, we're seeing as well.

Here's an example of that and how the coordination aspect of it works with Nova Scotia Power. They're pre-staging, they're doing all their planning, and they provide that information to us. They've got crews that they're going to pre-stage here and here. Whatever it is that they're planning, they're telling us.

In addition to that, when we are activated - say the power is out in a certain area. We have done this as recently as the blizzard a couple of weeks ago. They're saying, well, our crews are having a problem getting to area X, so we call up at the Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. The Departmental Emergency Planning Officer is there with their folks and says, okay, what is it that we need to do to solve this problem? So there could be snow plows going there. There could be graders - whatever is required to get those crews there. Bell Aliant may call up and say, in this particular circuit telephone exchange, we have battery backup for X number of hours, and the time is clicking down on that.

Then we look at the Nova Scotia Power overall restoration plan for that specific area because it follows physics. The electrons have to flow down the line. You can't automatically turn on a place in the middle of somewhere unless it's all connected through their system. I do not have the expertise there. However, we put the experts together, and they say, okay, this is going to be a priority, restoration going through here, so they will get to that. Or Bell Aliant will say, okay, we have to get a generator to that specific area so that we can maintain that circuit. Then we bring in other people to do that.

It's a protracted answer, but I tried to give you the fulsome aspect of the response because it's not just one specific area. It's about everything in its entirety that is affecting that community. It's telephone. It's the power. It's the roads. It's the municipalities. It's warming centres. If shelter is required, then we go through the Department of Community Services and the Red Cross. That's what it is that we do as far as that coordination piece.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for that insight on that process. I know that the government depends heavily on first responders and, especially as you leave the city, volunteer first responders. EMO may have a role. What role does your department have in ensuring that those volunteer departments continue? We know that the volunteer rate has dropped significantly.

I was a volunteer firefighter in Sackville, where we had a composite department - 35 full-time firefighters and 100 volunteers at the time. I think there are 20 volunteers, and that's just in Lower Sackville, which is a suburb of the city. In the rural communities, it's even greater. There is a challenge, I think, in the municipalities, with their tax rate and the

sheer population decrease we've seen in rural communities, to maintain those volunteer first responder units across the province.

What role does your department play in making sure that the government and other departments see the need to look at increasing funding support for services in rural communities across the province, especially those who volunteer, which EMO depends on heavily if the disaster is outside the city limits or outside the city limits of Cape Breton? I know there are the smaller municipal units with full-time staff but for the most part it's Halifax and Sydney.

What role do you play in ensuring the government knows there needs to be an increase in support towards those organizations?

MS. DEAN: Appreciating that I've been with Municipal Affairs for I think nine months, I do know that we have been working closely with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities on a review of volunteer fire safety and also of fire services because it is primarily a municipal responsibility and the province does have a role in trying to support those efforts.

I can't give you a lot of detail on that work although I know that we have undertaken some of that and we'd be happy to provide that at some point.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I appreciate that and I know you are new to it. What I'm asking is hopefully that you and your department will be an advocate for these organizations because it has been very frustrating.

Three years ago, I questioned the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education on support for volunteer firefighters, for increased support for municipalities to get those volunteer units WCB coverage, for example. At the time, the Minister of Health and Wellness indicated there were a lot of areas where we needed to improve support for them. There was pending legislation coming and we haven't seen anything in three years.

I'm concerned that it has been put on the back burner, from the Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. I know these organizations need an advocate within government and I would think that EMO and your department would be that advocate.

There is a need to act. We're very fortunate there are men and women who volunteer their time in communities across this province who respond to disasters when they have no power, when they have no water in their wells. I'm just asking that you make it a priority and hopefully you will.

I know I'm short on time - I want to go to the drought in southwestern Nova Scotia. I know my colleagues in my caucus have heard from a number of constituents throughout

that process in southwestern Nova Scotia about the drought conditions. They were hearing from people in June and I believe it wasn't until around September 15th when EMO put out, I believe, a message or communications. Why such a time delay, in my opinion and in the opinion of many constituents? Are you satisfied that you've done a debriefing to make sure that that communication will improve in the future if we see that again?

MS. DEAN: In June that area of the province - and I'm not going to minimize the effect of the drought this past summer because it was more severe than it has ever been in the past. I think what happened was it probably began to be experienced in June, but that has happened in the past so municipalities have been able to deal with that. I think what was different this time is that it was prolonged and the water was not coming back. That was certainly a differentiator from past experiences in that area where dug wells would have run dry.

Having said that, we were advised in August by the municipality of the severity of the situation, that it was really becoming chronic. As soon as we found out there was assistance required, we reported back and we were able to help them with their drinking water supply. That actual request from municipalities really didn't come to us until September, so it was later in the summer that we were asked to step in and provide some support, which we did. We were able to get shipments of water directly into the area very quickly, again thanks to the generosity of partners at the Retail Council of Canada and Labatt Breweries. There were 190 pallets of water donated or purchased that went immediately after we were advised that there was assistance required.

Another piece I will say is it was really an effort of all parties to try to respond when the situation was deemed to be much more severe than ever had been experienced in the past. So once we were notified of that, the province then stepped in, made the shower facilities open for the parks much longer than the parks were actually open. The municipalities also stepped up to provide public water for residents, TIR supplied a tanker so that we could truck water to people to where they might need to access it. There were other elements of support that were enacted very quickly once we became aware that they needed that assistance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I allowed the time to extend a bit there so you could get that in. We'll move now to the Liberal caucus and Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: The things you learn at Public Accounts Committee. I was very interested to hear about the agreement between the New England Governors with EMO and as we approach the 100th Anniversary of the Halifax Explosion, it's important to note that Boston really came to our rescue at that time.

In doing my research and you mentioned it a bit, Ms. Dean - there was EMO involvement in the Syrian refugees coming to Nova Scotia. I want to know why, because that was so unexpected to hear from you but also read about when I was briefing myself on this topic. How did you do that? What services did you provide?

MS. DEAN: Like you, I was unaware of the involvement of EMO in this and was really pleased to see how staff stepped up to help.

The situation was that the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia had extensive experience in settling refugees but didn't have the capacity to deal with the volume in such a short period of time. I'll go out on a limb and say they were asked by EMO to support, but I think it's also part of an all-province response. The province wanted to make sure that all departments that could help in the resettlement of Syrian refugees could provide what supports they would have and for Municipal Affairs and EMO - EMO would see an opportunity to help coordinate that response because of its expertise in incident command.

Basically my understanding is that EMO was able to coordinate and pull together some of the supports that were required. We opened a welcome centre at Chocolate Lake for the newcomers and brought services to them in a central location. They needed help with establishing identification, health checks, getting housing support, that kind of information.

Then EMO was instrumental in coordinating the refugee donations centre at Bayers Lake. I think people will recall that centre was absolutely flooded with donations; the generosity of Nova Scotians was evident. They received enormous donations that then had to be coordinated, and efforts to get those to the refugees had to be coordinated, so two EMO staff provided full-time support in the Fall and the winter to support that effort. Then in the peak period other staff volunteered because they wanted to be part of that.

Andy, I'm wondering if you'd like to elaborate. You were intimately involved in that response and perhaps you can add to that.

MR. LATHAM: It was an all-province response. It was a challenge for the province to welcome that number of folks. When we spoke to the subject matter experts at the Office of Immigration and at ISANS, we quickly recognized that their business model had certain limitations to it, so we sat down and went through the incident command system with these folks and recognizing that they are not first responders but it gives a command and control.

So to put it in very simplistic terms, and not necessarily for this audience, but from an emergency management perspective - when you are doing that assessment on a business model, what we saw was that there were parts of the pipe, if you will, that were this big, and we expanded them to this big in diameter to accommodate the numbers of folks who were coming.

Then what we did to ensure that capacity was there, again from a coordination perspective, was brought in the other government departments that were required to do that. So what you have is the Immigration Office, you have ISANS who are the subject matter experts in assisting folks in that relocation, and we learned a lot as well because folks coming with a different culture, a different language, different religious aspects. An

example that Deputy Dean spoke about - when the donation centre was set up, folks could come but we thought about that and ISANS educated us as to the challenges that new folks coming to Nova Scotia would face.

We didn't want it to be prescriptive or directive and say well here's a box of X number of things, what we have determined you needed. We put ourselves in their position and said, there but for the grace of God go any of us, so what would we want? So not knowing anything about retail at all, we went to the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation and we got their display stands. We set it up very similar to a big box store, to ensure that the folks who were coming in would have a shopping experience and be able to get their personal things, whether it's clothing for kids or whether it was furniture. So you would have a shopping experience when you were there and through the generosity of Nova Scotians, the shelves were well-stocked.

Folks came in and had that shopping experience because we heard very clearly from ISANS and from Immigration that a person's first experience - if it's good, that that's usually an indicator of their perhaps going to become permanent residents and that's what we wanted. We wanted people to feel welcome and we wanted to ensure they would be provided the same services as any of us if the shoe was on the other foot. That's the perspective that we undertook.

That speaks to some of the earlier questions about the all-hazards approach that we undertake at EMO. It doesn't matter what the challenge is, that we have the flexibility, the agility to adapt to that. In addition to the folks who were out there from our office who were doing it full time, there were other folks at our office who wanted to go out and volunteer, as well as all the other Nova Scotians who volunteered to ensure that this was successful. That's some of what we did in that particular event.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you, I'll pass it on to my colleague.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Thank you very much. You are certainly talking about issues that I have been involved with over my years working for Environment Canada as an environmental response person, to spills and other incidents, including pesticide fires and several plane disasters.

What I wanted to ask, I've been out of the government for 10 years. We used to have an organization called REET - I don't know if it still exists, I think it may be in another form. I know there has been a lot of cutbacks in the federal government in the respect of emergency officers for Environment Canada. I know you are quite familiar with the Environment Canada weather people who are very important in any disaster but also there are other emergency response people who are involved and also other volunteer groups, like the Red Cross. You've mentioned the Red Cross here a while ago - they take a very

important part in responding to local spills and local accidents, whether it's air-related, rail-related, that sort of thing.

I'm just wondering, REET used to kind of decide or help to decide who the responsible agency was for a particular incident. I'm just wondering if you could expand on that a little bit, how you determine who the response agency is and maybe where REET stands today if at all.

MR. LATHAM: It was a federal government decision to decentralize REET. REET is now out of Montreal, but we still have an active member of EMO who participates in any of that.

With recent events, the grounding of the ship at Cape Breton, we are actively involved. But the Coast Guard would be the lead agency on that. They would be calling in the federal environmental people. We were having regular situational awareness that we were distributing throughout the province to Department of Environment and to all other EM practitioners as we monitored that situation.

So it's active but in another form using the technologies of today. That was a federal government decision. We still participate, but it's the Coast Guard that would have the lead on the majority of those offshore spill situations, as I'm sure you would be well aware.

MR. HORNE: I think I should put a plug in there for the Red Cross. In my own community, we have a group that looks after emergency response and preparedness. I've been involved over the last number of years since I retired. The Red Cross is always involved when you have comfort stations and evacuation sites and so on.

MR. LATHAM: As part of our emergency response, the Department of Community Services has a contractual agreement with the Red Cross. When Community Services is brought in, they activate with the Red Cross. The municipalities are responsible for warming centres, and the Red Cross takes care of shelters - housing and feeding. There is a coordination point that we go to. As we share situational awareness with all folks, they get it as well. They then respond accordingly.

As you said, the good volunteers of the Red Cross are always at the ready to respond to any situation and have provided banner service to Nova Scotians over the years. We have a very close relationship with the Red Cross.

MR. HORNE: I would like to talk just a little bit about the training exercises. You mentioned and talked about them a little bit in detail. Do you have a format where you try to look at certain aspects of the emergency response and have it worked on, and an exercise plan pretty well every year or is it ad hoc? I know the volunteers change a lot, and when we get new volunteers, they do need to be trained to a certain point. I'm just wondering if you can comment on that aspect.

MR. LATHAM: Certainly. The Red Cross takes care of training. They have a very set number of courses for their volunteers, and I'm aware of that.

I was asked earlier in questions whether we do a debrief and I spoke about a hot-wash. When we identify what the issues are, that will be part of either a tabletop or training exercise so that we can address that and see how we can improve if there was an issue with it, how we can mitigate that issue. Or if there's specific training that people need, as far down as the trunk mobile radio system - if there's a change in it - then we bring in the subject matter experts within the provincial government to provide training on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I'm sorry, time has expired. We'll now allow Ms. Dean an opportunity for closing comments.

MS. DEAN: I would like to thank all of you for enabling us to discuss the important work of the Emergency Management Office. I think it is an organization that is oftentimes behind the scenes but when it has to step up, it is there in spades protecting and supporting Nova Scotians in times of emergencies or disasters.

I've certainly had a number of opportunities in the last several months to see the work of EMO first hand and I would like to say that the individuals who work there are incredibly passionate and their sense of responsibility and their dedication to helping others is amazing.

I'd like to extend my thanks to Andy and to Paul and the entire team at EMO and to all of our government and private sector partners who work with us collaboratively when we are in difficult situations. It's obvious to me that EMO takes care of Nova Scotians during some of our most difficult times and we're very fortunate to have an organization like EMO.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. We do have some committee business.

We have some correspondence. There are three pieces of correspondence. We received one from Nova Scotia Business Inc. related to information requested from the January 18th meeting. Are there any questions or comments related to that correspondence?

Hearing none, we'll move to the next piece, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. That was information requested from the January 25th meeting. Any questions or comments?

Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: In that letter that the committee sent to the department, it asked a very specific question around toll revenues from the Cobequid Pass; it's question 2 on the specific letter. I think the answer that came back to that question didn't really speak to

the question. The question was, where has the toll revenue been spent? The answer was - I don't want to say evasive but it didn't answer the question.

I'd like to ask if the committee can send another letter back to Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal asking for more information on that specific question. The question was pretty specific - where was the toll revenue spent? I just think we can drill down a bit further on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments?

We will ask our committee clerk to do as you have asked, Mr. Houston. Any other comments on that piece of correspondence?

Hearing none, we'll move to the third piece which was the Department of Municipal Affairs, information requested from the February 1st meeting. Any questions or comments on that?

Hearing none, our next meeting is March 8th. That will be with the Department of Health and Wellness and the Nova Scotia Health Authority, on the topic of physician services.

Is there any further business to come before the committee? Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: With the sitting last week and the live streaming, a lot more people were going to tune in to what was happening here at Province House and this Legislature. I know in the past the Speaker of the House has made some comments about the dress code in the House and some of the things that were happening in the House.

I'm not sure what the dress code is for this committee but since this committee takes place in this Chamber, I'd like to make a motion that this committee respect the same dress codes that are applicable, I guess, for when the House is sitting.

That may be the case now, I'm not sure, but I'd like this committee to pass a motion that when this committee is sitting and it is televised - maybe more committees will be in time as well - when this committee is sitting in this Chamber and it is televised, I'd like to make a motion that this committee respect the dress codes that are applicable for when the House is in session.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston has made a motion that the dress code for the Legislative Assembly also pertain to our committee meetings.

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

The motion is carried.

Our clerk will make note of that and we will make note of that in our rules for the committee here. Thank you.

Is there any further business to come before the committee?

Hearing none, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:54 a.m.]