

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

Legislative Chamber

**Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
Department of Agriculture
Export Development**

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Public Accounts Committee

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[Mr. Bill Horne replaced Mr. Chuck Porter]

In Attendance:

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Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Terry Spicer
Deputy Auditor General

WITNESSES

Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture **Department of Agriculture**

Mr. Frank Dunn, Deputy Minister
Mr. Bruce Osborne, Executive Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture
Mr. Ernest Walker, Senior Director Policy, Agriculture
Ms. Loretta Robichaud, Senior Director,
Agriculture and Food Operations Branch, Agriculture



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 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 Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, and also the Department of Agriculture. We're going to be discussing export development. I'd like to remind everyone to place their phones on silent so we don't have interruptions. We'll start with introductions.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn, you may now begin with opening comments.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Good morning to you, Mr. Chairman, and to committee members. Thank you for inviting us to join you today. I would like to give a brief introduction to the department staff beyond names and positions just so that folks know who they are. Bruce Osborne is the Executive Director of Fisheries with the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Bruce has a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Master's in Marine Management. He has worked in Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, and has been executive director for more than two years. If we get into details on Fisheries questions, perhaps I'll look to Mr. Osborne to help me out on some of the answers.

Loretta Robichaud is the Senior Director of Agriculture and Food Operations with the Department of Agriculture. Loretta has a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, and she also has a Master's in Public Administration from Dalhousie. She has worked with the Department of Agriculture and other Public Service fields for over 28 years, so she's my go-to person on the agriculture questions.

Ernest Walker is our Senior Director of Policy and Corporate Services for both of our departments. Ernest has responsibility for Policy Planning, Corporate Services and Programs. He has a Master's in Public Administration from Dalhousie University and has worked in the Nova Scotia Public Service with a variety of departments for over 26 years.

Once again, thank you for having us here today. Today's discussion comes at an exciting time for our departments and for the province. It's no secret to anyone in this room that Nova Scotia is Canada's seafood leader. In 2016, we exported over \$1.8 billion of seafood to markets around the world.

Top seafood exports in order are: lobster, crab, scallops, and shrimp. For the second year in a row we sold more seafood in the world than any other province in Canada, and we're very close to one-third of all seafood exports from Canada. This is something that Nova Scotia should be very proud about. It's a sign of the leadership that industry is showing and looking for new and innovative ways to supply global markets. It is also a sign that our future is tied to exports of seafood products. Our traditions are steeped in the fishery.

Our economy sees significant benefits because of our ocean advantage - clean, clear water, and the ability to sustainably harvest from these waters. We know how to supply global markets with top-quality seafood and our fish harvesters, seafood processors, and exporting companies are doing it successfully every day. From here we are reaching markets in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and doing it in record times - delivering high-quality, fresh and processed, premium Nova Scotia seafood to a hungry world.

The hard work of industry along with government's commitment to supporting innovation and export market development is what has helped us reach \$1.8 billion in seafood exports in 2016. It's a remarkable achievement and I can't say enough to thank our seafood harvesters, processors, and exporters for making this possible. They have made us Canada's leader in seafood exports and have met the challenge of the One Nova Scotia report to double our exports within 10 years.

To continue to grow what we receive from seafood exports, we have launched a Nova Scotia international seafood brand. I was with the minister just last week at the seafood expo in Boston where we showcased the new brand to the largest seafood show on the continent. I can tell you that the response was positive, enthusiastic from exporters and buyers at the show. Our new brand will help give Nova Scotia a competitive advantage in key global markets and communicate a clear message about our seafood: its exceptional taste and premium quality.

Aquaculture is also part of our success story. Valued at \$55 million in 2015, it's another form of seafood production that fits with our history and promises a bright future for our rural communities. Government has been moving forward carefully and deliberately to create an environment where aquaculture can develop safely and sustainably. We have a progressive set of regulations that are among the most robust in the world, and we started to engage with industry and Nova Scotians to help the industry grow.

At this time, we're also supporting the growth of our \$58 million sport fishery by undertaking work to restore wild populations of salmon and trout. It is also part of a long-term commitment by government and the angling community to restore river habitat.

Last Fall in co-operation with the federal government and the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, we announced a river liming project on the West River Sheet Harbour that will mitigate the effects of acid rain and support restoration of trout and wild Atlantic salmon habitat on the river.

Nova Scotia is also shaped by our agriculture industry. It's part of the story of our export success with our farming and agri-food businesses undertaking innovation and continuing with global markets.

Government is working with them to help achieve success through our programs and services and the expertise of our dedicated staff. Nova Scotia exported \$350 million in agriculture products in 2016. Our blueberries, apples, processed food products, and beverages are showing up on tables around the world.

There are many examples of how we're innovating in order to open export markets to our agriculture sector. We're working with the Nova Scotia wild blueberry and wine sectors to develop a blueberry wine that can be sold in China as a premium product.

We're supporting the export potential of our wine industry as part of the Vineyard Expansion and Development program - \$12 million committed over four years to support planting more grapes, product research and development, quality initiatives, and export market development. The wine sector is one in particular where there is tremendous potential for export growth. We're also working with the sector to help adapt and prepare for export success.

Perennia developed market readiness workshops to more than 40 participants in four locations across the province in the Fall of 2016. They're also helping clients achieve international certifications that open opportunities in international markets and providing incubator space to help start-ups and to grow future exports.

The Apple Industry Growth and Efficiency Program is supporting the growth of our apple industry and apple growers as they continue to plant high-density orchards of premium fresh market varieties. Apples are a real success story. Their export value has

increased more than seven times from approximately \$1.9 million in 2005 to more than \$15 million in 2016.

Our approach to export development in both of our departments is consistent with the goal of One Nova Scotia to sustainably double our agriculture and seafood products within 10 years.

Why are we doing this? Because we see the opportunities that are out there for Nova Scotia seafood and agriculture products, and because we see what it can mean for growing the economy in our coastal and rural communities.

There's a booming demand for food, thanks to an expanded global middle class and this means great things and possibilities for our seafood and aquaculture sectors. By 2015, global food demands will have risen by 70 per cent. This is an opportunity we're working hard to take an advantage of, as a province. We're performing at a high level as our seafood exports are reaching markets, as are our agriculture products. The potential for success is great, whether in seafood or agriculture.

We'll continue to focus on our deliberate, thoughtful approach that is focused on working with industry and promote innovation and sound decision making. With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I welcome questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston, you have 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for the opening comments. I do want to start with lobster. Atlantic Canada possesses almost a natural monopoly on our type of lobsters. That's an advantage we have for sure.

You mentioned the rise in exports of our lobster in dollar values - I wonder if you can say if the export value of lobster by pound is rising as well. In other words, if you look back at 2013, our dollar was at par with the U.S. dollar. Now our dollar has come down significantly so there's a natural advantage there, too, with our product and our currency. When you convert our sales to Canadian dollars, the number is going way up and many people say that's all that's happening.

I wonder if you can say, is the poundage of lobster that's being exported increasing?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Mr. Chairman, maybe I'll start and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Osborne. As far as lobster is concerned, you are correct - the export value of lobster is a combination of both volume sold and the differential between the exchange rate in the U.S.A.

I can tell you that our strategy around lobster in particular is one about growing the premium market. I won't get into a whole lot of what we're doing right now, but I'm sure

there will be questions later around that. Our idea is to find a niche where we deliver high-quality lobster product at a premium price around the world. I'll turn it over to . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Yes, just on the very specific question, if you have the statistic at hand on the poundage of lobster that's exported this year, versus maybe a couple of years ago. If you don't have it at hand, maybe we can get it.

MR. BRUCE OSBORNE: Yes, I can provide the number later, the actual volume of export. It is down a little bit in 2016, I don't have the actual number. Landings figures for Nova Scotia lobster - Nova Scotia fish landings in general - are not available yet from the DFO. The most recent figures we have to work from would be 2015, as we look at landings.

MR. HOUSTON: So when we hear that the exports of lobster are increasing dramatically, the only thing - if you don't have the landings figures and you don't know the poundage, the only thing you can possibly attribute that to is the currency, right?

MR. OSBORNE: No, there's really three things when you look at those export values. There's the volume of landings, there's the currency, and there are price increases. All those factors attribute to the overall export value.

Lobster prices increased a little bit last year, which helped offset some of the decrease. So we did see a continued growth last year in lobster-export value, despite a small decrease in the volume of exports. That was offset, as I said, by the decrease.

MR. HOUSTON: The volume is down but the overall prices aren't. I was curious. I was hearing that, I didn't know whether to believe it or not but it sounds like it is true and I was curious if you had the statistics. We'll try and get those in time and maybe I'll ask for the statistics of the actual volume.

Now you mentioned the Nova Scotia brand. At one point, there was talk of a lobster levy, working in co-operation with our neighbouring provinces? Is all that gone to the wayside? Are we going to do it on our own here on marketing our Nova Scotia lobster?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Through you, Mr. Chairman, on the lobster levy we have very much left it with the industry in Nova Scotia to decide how they want to proceed on the lobster levy. It's up to them. We see ourselves as . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Well, the decision is kind of made if we've decided to go with a Nova Scotia brand. I think that's how you referred to the product you were showcasing in Boston over the last couple of weeks. Was it called Nova Scotia brand?

MR. FRANK DUNN: That's correct.

MR. HOUSTON: Nova Scotia brand kind of closes the door on working with neighbouring provinces, does it not?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I would say not. The Nova Scotia brand, part of the brand is also an acknowledgement of the Canadian brand as well. The lobster levy per se may be used for things other than a marketing product. We have left it to the industry in Nova Scotia to decide whether they want to enter into an agreement, whether it's a levy on lobster . . .

MR. HOUSTON: So from the department's perspective, lobster levy or not, it's somebody else's decision, I guess, if industry wants to go ahead. Years are passing since the minister was talking about a lobster levy.

MR. FRANK DUNN: It's working with the industry to acknowledge what the industry wants. I see the department as more of an enabler. There have been legislative regulation changes made that would allow a levy if the industry chose to go in that direction.

MR. HOUSTON: For our lobster grounds, very fertile lobster grounds, particularly in the area that I come from, are you concerned about invasive species in those lobster grounds, different types of crabs? Is it something that the department is concerned about, an invasive species endangering our native lobsters?

MR. OSBORNE: We're concerned about any threat to any of our commercial species . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Is there any specific invasive species that's threatening our lobsters at the moment that you're aware of?

MR. OSBORNE: I have no great concern of a particular species that has been brought to my attention most recently. Certainly in the past, green crab has been identified from industry as a potential predator, particularly on juvenile lobster. I would say to that as well that some recent federal announcements include funding for invasive species work. We'll all be looking at how we can further do work to mitigate or prevent invasive species.

MR. HOUSTON: So there's potentially some federal - is that from the new budget? Did they announce some funding for invasive species research, the feds?

MR. OSBORNE: It could be part of the new funding announcement.

MR. HOUSTON: Oh, could be. Okay, so we don't know. It might be or it might not be. Would that be something that you would want to see included in there?

MR. OSBORNE: We are always concerned about invasive species impacting our commercial fisheries, sure.

MR. HOUSTON: I do want to talk about the new safety gear changes that will definitely impact the lobster fishery in Nova Scotia. I know it's not you guys per se, but I'm curious to know where you're at.

Obviously, some of the changes are good things. Job safety assessment is a good thing, right? More training around first aid, these are good things. Survival suits - I hear mixed things on those.

But the life raft requirement is an expensive requirement for our local fishers. I'm just wondering where the department is on that. If you have a lobster fisher who's going a mile from shore or two miles from shore or even surrounded by 20 or 25 boats in pretty close proximity, the requirement for a life raft is expensive, and it's onerous as well. I've actually talked to one guy who's going to shave some length off his boat because it's cheaper for him to do that.

Where are you guys on these new requirements? Are you totally supportive of them, or are you trying to work with the feds to make them a little bit more practical? Where is the department at?

MR. OSBORNE: The rules that you're referring to are federal rules, Transport Canada rules. The department is actively involved in safety, working with industry through the fishing safety committee of Nova Scotia. We've made significant commitments to that effort, working with them. There's a Fishing Safety Now strategy in place that has 33 recommendations. Our department is working with industry to implement those recommendations. We have four staff members who . . .

MR. HOUSTON: So you're working on the implementation. Are you working to change what has been pushed out?

MR. OSBORNE: On the Fishing Safety Now plan, which is an industry committee plan.

MR. HOUSTON: Are you supportive of the recommendations that have been made all the way down to the life raft?

MR. OSBORNE: Safety in the industry is very important. I don't have a comment on the specific federal regulations or the . . .

MR. HOUSTON: So you wouldn't say whether they've gone too far or not?

MR. OSBORNE: I don't have a comment on those federal regulations.

MR. HOUSTON: Maybe the deputy. The life raft in particular, is a concern to a lot of fishers in Nova Scotia; it seems like it's a bit too much. Everyone wants a safe environment for sure, I'm not disputing that. I'm just asking the question of whether the

department feels that - let's talk about the life raft requirement. It has gone too far or is it fine? It's just a simple question. Is the department good with it?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can say specifically around the life raft requirement, I have not had discussions with staff around whether it has gone too far or not. I think I'd reiterate what Mr. Osborne said - regardless, safety is extremely important in the industry and it's important to the department as well.

MR. HOUSTON: What about the owner-operator policy? Is the department's position that the policy as it is now - are they good with that? Would they defend that policy? What is the department's thoughts on the owner-operator policy?

MR. FRANK DUNN: We're supportive of an owner-operator policy.

MR. HOUSTON: Of the existing policy? You would like to see it stay the way it is.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Correct.

MR. HOUSTON: We have a very successful charter tuna fishery starting in this province. Most people have one tag for a tuna. People come up, tourists, and go fishing. It would be nice if they could kill a tuna as well. Are there any thoughts to trying to work with the charter fishery to see if there are more tags available? What are your thoughts on that?

MR. OSBORNE: We do have a strong interest in developing sport fish fisheries, including marine sport fish such as Bluefin tuna. Staff in our department have been involved in helping develop that Bluefin tuna charter business for a while.

With respect to how those tags are provided and the actual management within that fishery, that's primarily the federal government as well - Fisheries and Oceans Canada. There are certain interactions around access to the resource between the commercial harvesters and the charter group. I don't have a specific comment around getting additional tags, other than we would encourage those conversations to be had around the advisory committee tables where all those folks are participating.

MR. HOUSTON: I guess the crossover between the federal and the provincial is kind of like the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school boards. It's always like somebody else is supposed to deal with that.

I guess as a general question I would ask, is it the department's responsibility to advocate for Nova Scotian fishers with the federal government or is it the department's responsibility to just implement what the feds tell them to do? That's a question for the deputy because it's important to all these issues. Is the department implementing what the feds want or is the department meant to be pushing for Nova Scotian fishers?

MR. FRANK DUNN: In general, I can say there are very specific responsibilities and accountabilities that are laid out around what the federal government and what the provincial government do. That's one part of our job.

The other part of our job is obviously to advocate for our fishers in Nova Scotia and we have conversations with the federal government, particularly through Fisheries and Oceans Canada on many files to express in some cases our support and in some cases perhaps not our support when it comes to particular files. But like any government, at the end of the day, the federal government will decide what they want to do on their responsibilities - hopefully with informed input from Nova Scotia.

MR. HOUSTON: Hopefully some of those times when you disagree with them, you have been successful at changing. Maybe we'll come back to that. I'm kind of bumping the clock and I do want to talk about the mackerel fishery.

The Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee is meeting in Halifax tomorrow, I think. I think this is a meeting where the minister will set the quota, I guess, for the next couple of years. Will you be at that meeting?

MR. OSBORNE: We will have staff at those meetings, yes. There's local meetings and then there's meetings in Quebec as well.

MR. HOUSTON: Would somebody who is here today be at that meeting?

MR. OSBORNE: No.

MR. HOUSTON: So staff would be there. Fishers are worried that the quota will be cut and they're worried that the quota will be cut based on science that they believe is either flawed or dated. Have you heard from mackerel fishers and mackerel buyers about their concerns about the quota and what's happening?

Statistics that I've seen show the landings for mackerel this year are almost 20 times higher than what they were over the last couple of years, yet the science is suggesting that mackerel is an endangered species, so the two things don't really jibe. It's a lucrative fishery for this province, it would be a shame to see the quota cut.

I don't know if you've been in contact with Ryan Langille. He's a young entrepreneur, he's in his sixth year of growing a fish-buying business. In 2012, he sold 70,000 pounds of mackerel, compared to last year where he sold 1.7 million pounds. He's growing a business; he's becoming a bit of an expert on the mackerel fishery.

Is this somebody who you could advocate for to appear at some of these meetings where the quota is being set? I think he has asked specifically if he can be at those meetings tomorrow. I know that none of you guys are going but staff is going. Could you get Ryan at that meeting tomorrow, to represent the mackerel fishery?

MR. FRANK DUNN: A couple of questions there, Mr. Chairman. With regard to whether we met with Ryan Langille, we have. I've met with him, the minister has met with him, and I believe that Bruce has as well.

MR. HOUSTON: Does it make sense, what he's saying?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Well we're supportive and we've actually had staff work with him to try to facilitate ensuring that the federal government understands what his concerns are. I guess from an unbiased opinion, there's a difference in opinion around the science with regard to the mackerel stock.

We've had our groundfish adviser work with him, made some contact with the federal government. I know that I've actually been copied on some correspondence that Mr. Langille has made, as late as this morning, about attending that meeting. It is a DFO meeting so I can't see us being able to have the ability to have him added to the meeting. I know he has asked DFO; I don't know if he received a reply.

MR. HOUSTON: So this is the first year the mackerel fishery was ever closed, I think certainly in recent memory and could possibly be in history. You understand why they're concerned. So the department itself will be at the meetings, what position will the staff be taking? Will they be taking a position that there's lots of mackerel out there, folks? Or will they be taking the position that the federal science says there's not many so therefore there's not many? Where are you guys on that?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I'll turn it over to Mr. Osborne in a second but I think it's important for committee members to remember that when it comes to the fishery and whether a fishery is open or closed, that is not a responsibility of the province. We talked a little bit about responsibilities and what the federal government may or may not be responsible for, and that's one that the federal government is responsible for.

I will turn it over to Mr. Osborne with regard to . . .

MR. HOUSTON: But if this meeting is going to set the quota, which I understand that it is, that's an important fact, that's an important outcome of that meeting. It's an important fishery so I'm a little taken aback that - I don't want to demean the staff that will be there but I would have thought that that might have elevated to your level, deputy, that you'd be an interested stakeholder in that meeting, quite frankly, and could go and at least advance the position of some of the fishers: don't cut this quota on us, there's no reason to cut the quota.

That's a hard thing for staff to do. It's hard for staff to go and say that the position of Nova Scotia is that this quota shouldn't be cut, so maybe that's not your position and the staff will go and listen intently, I don't know. It seems like an important meeting to have in Halifax but not be represented by the senior levels of the department. Am I missing something?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Perhaps I will ask Mr. Osborne to talk a bit about the process of the meeting and how the meeting operates, but I can only . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Well, I guess in the interest of time will the quota be set tomorrow?

MR. OSBORNE: I'm not aware that the quota will be set tomorrow. Decisions around access are made by the federal minister when the minister decides. The meetings that are under way are a combination of science meetings and ultimately advisory meetings where opinions such as Mr. Langille's would be able to be put on the table as well as all the other stakeholders in the sector.

MR. HOUSTON: Except he can't go and put his opinion on the table.

MR. OSBORNE: He can certainly ask to go.

MR. HOUSTON: He has asked to go, but he hasn't been supported by the department in that ask, I don't believe.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for being here. Export development definitely has a huge impact on our economy. I know a lot of the attention has been around fisheries and making sure that our product gets out and about around the world, and to improve that is something that we all want to see here in the province. It's not just the fisheries. I think you mentioned in your opening comments about potential for blueberry wine. So it's a topic that I think is important.

I know governments of all stripes have recognized that here in Nova Scotia and across the country. I know the former provincial and federal governments partnered recently, in 2012, with the Halifax International Airport Authority to expand the runway to accommodate larger cargo planes to land, take off, and hopefully get our cargo out further than our borders.

Can you give us any indication on if that investment has paid off? Have we seen an increase in larger cargo planes and the ability for us to get some of our products to market over the last - I think it was 2012 when it officially opened, I believe, or somewhere around there? Have you seen the increase in those larger planes and the ability to get our products out of the province into the export market?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I think I would start by saying it's critical to have these larger planes being able to export our seafood products around the world because time is important and quality is important. So the quicker that we can export our products to other markets around the world, the better off we are.

With regard to your question specifically, maybe what I'll do is just give you some numbers for our top four exports. Our number one export is lobster. If you look at the change in our export value from 2012 to 2016, we've increased by 154 per cent. So that's from about \$375 million in 2012 - we're now up close to \$1 billion on lobster. So when you talk about these large cargo planes, I would suggest that the majority of the seafood that's being exported out of those large cargo planes is lobster.

Just quickly on crab, we've seen an increase of 68 per cent, from \$133 million to \$225 million. On scallops, we've seen an increase of 43 per cent, from \$98 million to \$140 million. On the shrimp, we've seen an increase of 36 per cent, from \$83 million to \$112 million.

MR. DAVID WILSON: So that \$5 million investment paid off. I was very proud to be part of the government to recognize that and I hope the current government recognizes the importance of making sure that getting our product to the market is a top priority.

Of course, we have trains, trucks, shipping - what other areas have the government - has there been any concentration on trying to improve the ability to export other than air cargo over the last number of years? Has there been any attention on the other areas of transportation?

MR. OSBORNE: Just to touch on the air freight a little bit there, we do play a role in helping the airport folks understand the seafood industry and its needs. We're in regular contact providing them with information and statistics, anything they need, really, to try and attract that lift.

I think one of the most important things that we can do as a department in supporting that is building the level of those exports. Then the carriers will look to establish there. That's primarily the two roles that we play with air.

We also have done work and support companies that were looking at live shipment, particularly of shellfish. These are companies in BioNovations. In the past, there was another company called Aqualife that was around. These are technical systems to transport shellfish longer distances, either on trucks or on cargo ships.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know margins are slim, and often you need to transport over long distances so every dollar counts. I know there has been some talk recently on the federal level about privatizing our airports. To me that means entering a profit-driven kind of philosophy to running our airports, which can be damaging, I think, especially if we're trying to attract more carriers to Halifax, for example.

Has there been any discussion in your department to ensure that the federal government recognizes that there has been significant investment, not only provincially but also federally, in our airport to ensure that we can hopefully increase access to the market and that privatization could play a role in hurting our ability to attract more carriers?

Has there been any discussion on your level? If not, shouldn't there be? The sheer numbers that you've just given us shows that that investment in the airport is so important. Has there been any discussion on the possibility of privatization of the airports across the country? I assume Halifax would be one they would be looking at.

MR. FRANK DUNN: There hasn't been a discussion with me, as Deputy Minister of Agriculture or Fisheries and Aquaculture. I would suggest that it may be a question best put to the Deputy Minister of Business or IGA. It's a little outside Fisheries and Aquaculture's . . .

MR. DAVID WILSON: I respect that, and I know others within government may be looking at that. But you represent an important industry. I feel that if it does come from your department, your concern, then people will start paying attention to this, instead of paying attention to it after the federal government makes a decision. In my opinion, you're in a perfect role to at least put up a flag to say that we should really look at this. Potentially, it could have an impact on the area that you represent as deputy. I understand that next week they could move you out of here, but I think as a department, you're well within the role that you play to put up a flag.

My question would be, would you or could you make sure that somebody within the department maybe has a discussion on a broader sense with your counterparts - if it's Business or even the Premier - to make sure the Premier knows that this is something that could impact our department and the people we serve. Maybe that's an ask. I don't know if there's an answer to that, or we'll just leave it at that.

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can say to the member that I'll have conversation with my colleagues in some other departments.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Excellent. I understand completely that it's going to be a federal decision, but there will be implications, and that's just one that I know we've thought about over the last little while.

Over the last number of years, access to southern Asia has been an important market. I know Premier Dexter has gone on trade missions. I know Premier McNeil has also gone, to make sure that we open up that market. I think it's an important one, but our largest trading partner definitely is to the south of us, the U.S. So with a lot of emphasis on Asia, what has been the existing relationship or the current relationship with our neighbours to the south in the U.S., especially since the new President came aboard in the Fall. What can you say about that relationship and the access to that market, and are you working to make sure that our products get down to the U.S. in a timely manner because they are so close?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Absolutely, we are monitoring the situation in the United States. I can say that our seafood exports to the states make up about 56 per cent of our exports and on the agriculture side almost 59 per cent, so a substantial amount.

I think the best way to describe it is as a concern with the current administration. Keep in mind that this is a country-to-country situation. I know that Global Affairs Canada has had many conversations with the U.S. administration. Our liaison with Global Affairs Canada is our IGA department and they have reached out to us on numerous occasions - whether it's a seafood file or whether it's an agriculture file. Work is ongoing and I have not heard anything directly out of the U.S. that concerns me now.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Of course it could just come out of left field by the manner of how the President signs these orders every other day and shows everybody on TV what he has done that day. I hope that they recognize the close relationship.

I know a lot of the members in the House have been involved with CSG - the Council of State Governments - the eastern regional conference. That's of course eastern seaboard states and the Canadian provinces on the east working together on a level that kind of doesn't include the federal governments on both parts, and it seems like a lot of good work has taken place. So a great opportunity to make sure that we work in a timely way to make sure that the federal governments don't mess things up when they bring policy in. We've seen a number of examples of that over the years.

One of the other areas of concern is the Canadian-EU Trade Agreement - CETA. What impact will that have on fisheries and agriculture exports here in the province? Have you done an evaluation on what the impact would be for those products?

MR. FRANK DUNN: It will have a positive impact on both the seafood side and the fisheries side. I know that the European Union signed off on the agreement in February. It's the plan now that the federal government will sign off on it very soon - end of March, early April.

I can tell you that the new agreement will reduce tariffs on over 90 per cent of the products that we ship into the European Union, both on the seafood side and on the agriculture side. In fact, I've seen information which I can provide to you if you like, which will actually show the number of tariffs, the amount of the tariff and what the reduction will be, so very positive. It will be cheaper for us to ship our goods into the European Union.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Yes, that would be very useful if you could provide the committee with that.

On the flip side, imports - and I know dairy, for example - cheese, milk - I know that there are concerns in the industry around the potential impact. What kind of valuation have you done on the impact in the dairy industry and to what degree will the federal government help our industry here in Nova Scotia?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Walker.

MR. ERNEST WALKER: There has been a fair amount of discussion with the federal government around the impacts on the supply managed sector and of course with the CETA agreement, cheese is the most impacted. I know the federal government has announced some measures to support processing support for the dairy and cheese sector.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I love cheese, but I love our economy growing, to make sure that those local farmers are taken care of. I hope that the province stands strongly behind them. I know we can turn to the 90 per cent reduction tariffs on exports, but imports could hurt our economy also.

I want to turn quickly to - I think there was mention of the recommendations around the Fisheries Safety Association of Nova Scotia. There's 33 of them, I believe. I know my colleague Sterling Belliveau comes from the industry and recently has talked about the need to look at safety and personal floatation devices. Do any of those recommendations discuss PFDs in any way, changing the requirements that are currently in place for safety on vessels?

MR. OSBORNE: We can provide you with a full list of the 33 recommendations. I can say specifically that that committee, industry, and those life preserver companies - companies that manufacture those goods - have worked together to prototype and trial life-saving equipment that is actually workable and feasible aboard fishing vessels.

As you may be aware, for a number of years, industry expressed concern that the available equipment just didn't meet their needs. So by working together with a number of manufacturers, there is now equipment that works well. I believe it will be an ongoing improvement process that, as additional things are found, they will continually be improved. There has been a lot of work done on making sure that the equipment suits the work that's being done on the back of boats.

MR. DAVID WILSON: What I'm hearing, I hope, is that the department is open to changes to those regulations, those policies - legislation if need be - in the future, as we look at this issue. We know the tragic cases that we've seen over the last number of years. It unfortunately always brings up the discussion around personal floatation devices. I would assume that the government is willing to look at potential changes to the policies or regulations around personal floatation devices in the future.

MR. OSBORNE: I think everybody is interested in safety. Whatever would benefit safety for the industry is what the department would support. As I said, we work through the industry committee and with the federal government to implement those recommendations.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Thank you. I'm glad to hear that. I know my colleague will be glad to hear that also.

Let's to go to fisheries now. The Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance has recently asked the government to stop issuing new buyer and processor licences. I know the minister hasn't shut the door on it. Where is the department and the minister on that request from the Seafood Alliance?

MR. FRANK DUNN: The member is talking about buyer and processing licences in Nova Scotia. The Seafood Alliance, which used to be the Nova Scotia Fish Packers Association, has stated their position. We have not made a decision one way or another on any licence policy changes.

We're in early days of discussion on this matter. As you would appreciate, there are those in the industry that would have another view on that statement. At this stage of the game, the department is being very open-minded. We want to have discussions with numerous stakeholders so that we can be best informed.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Are you aware of that request in the past? Is this something that is just recent, or have they asked in the past about tightening up and maybe not issuing as many licences as we've seen in the past?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I have not heard that request since I've been at Fisheries and Aquaculture, although I have not been there very long, so I would look to Mr. Osborne, who has been there slightly longer than I have.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know I only have one minute. There have been asks in the past, and ministers have closed the door pretty quickly, realizing the impact. We're just a bit concerned that the door hasn't been closed. I hope the department makes every effort to make sure that they engage those who will be affected if any decision like this has been made.

I think there's a negative impact on the industry if the door is left open too long. I would encourage the department and the minister to make a decision to either close the door and lock it, put a deadbolt on it, or do what the government is going to do. Thank you for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson. The time is just expiring.

Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for coming here today. I have just a few questions in regard to aquaculture. You said we are at \$55 million, is that right?

MR. FRANK DUNN: That's correct.

MR. MAGUIRE: Are we maxed out? If so, where do we go from here? If not, what is the department's goal for industry growth?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can say that we are not maxed out. We've talked a lot so far this morning about commercial fishery. We also have a goal on the aquaculture side to grow the aquaculture industry because we believe that it's a strong economic driver in coastal rural communities in Nova Scotia. Our goal is to reach a value of somewhere around \$280 million.

Currently, we are not accepting new applications for salmon, in particular. I can best describe it as being cautious and deliberate as we move forward in the aquaculture industry to ensure that everyone in the sector, both those who are positive with regard to the economy and those that have some concerns around how the sector may impact the environment - we've been very deliberate in addressing the concerns of both as best we can.

I mentioned the robust regulations that we have in place for the aquaculture sector. I can tell you that the minister has an Aquaculture Regulatory Advisory Committee, which is made up of not only business but also other stakeholders, including NGOs, to advise him when those regulations were formed.

The minister also has a Science Advisory Committee, which is chaired by Bruce Hatcher, who is a professor out of Cape Breton. We have recently appointed a third party review panel which will actually look at applications for amendments to existing licences and applications for new applications as we move forward.

MR. MAGUIRE: You mentioned concerns particularly around environment. Could you elaborate a little bit on that? Also, if there is an expansion of the salmon aquaculture industry, what kind of impact do you see it having on rural Nova Scotia economically? Also what kind of impact does it have on the small fishing communities that rely heavily on lobster and other groundfish?

We've seen examples, particularly in Scotland and Australia, where the aquaculture industry is working closely with the inshore fishing groups and also with the local communities, so they have buy-in from both stakeholders. Are we looking at a model like that? I know that's a couple of questions.

MR. FRANK DUNN: I'll attempt to answer some of them and then maybe turn it over to Mr. Osborne for some more detail. The department believes totally that we can have aquaculture development in the province in coastal communities that can co-exist with - you referred to the commercial lobster fishery. We believe we can. We believe there's great opportunity.

MR. MAGUIRE: Are there models of that? Have you looked at the different industries from around the world to see how the relationships are with the local ground fisheries?

MR. FRANK DUNN: We have, and perhaps Mr. Osborne can give a little more detail.

MR. OSBORNE: Yes we have. In particular, during the formation of the new regulations, a lot of effort was put in to look at how other jurisdictions regulate their industry and how they interact.

Most recently, the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture and our director of aquaculture were in New Zealand and Australia and visited with both industry and government people to see how their system works. Every system has pros and cons, so it's important to understand those and also how the systems might reflect back home.

Part of the earlier question that you asked was about impacts, and the deputy mentioned our view of co-existence, and we certainly do see that in Atlantic Canada. We have seen a significant increase in both commercial fisheries, as well as aquaculture throughout the region over the last couple of decades, so we certainly do believe that the two can co-exist.

With specific reference to lobster, the department and the minister have stated that the approach is a science-based approach. So we will use science and the science committee is there to help the department and the regulatory committee review science to make fact-based decisions around issues of interactions or impacts.

One of the things that the department has done very specifically looking at the lobster interaction question has been to fund some work with Université Sainte-Anne to look specifically at the lobster question and work very directly with lobster harvesters to find out what actually their concerns are and then look to put the science in place to start answering some of those questions.

MR. MAGUIRE: I'm just going to use an example - and we've had this discussion before, around a gentleman that lived just down the street from me, Brian Blanchard, who is an expert on aquaculture. He had been around for a long time and just recently, he packed his bags and moved to New Zealand - actually I think it's Australia. Brian and I had a discussion over Christmas about the difference with regard to how the public views aquaculture in Australia, and here.

How do we get that buy-in? You keep saying we're going to use science, but if the science is coming from government, inevitably there are going to be people who don't believe that science. They may think that they're just trying to pad their own tax pockets. So how do we get the buy-in from communities and say, this is working, this is how it's done?

Ultimately if we're going to do this, this has to be safe and it has to be sustainable, and we don't want to see an impact to our groundfish industry. So how do we do that and

convince communities, like some of these other jurisdictions have done? What is your plan?

MR. FRANK DUNN: There are a couple of things I think we can do. This is a file that I'm actually quite interested in. In my mind, many commodities that we use, we develop in Nova Scotia - not just aquaculture but a series of natural resources, commodities - it's a similar question.

In my mind, there is a two-pronged approach to this. One is the education piece, educating the general public and communities where aquaculture facilities may be, around exactly what an aquaculture facility is, how it impacts the environment, and the protocols and safeguards that we have in place to ensure that some concerns around the environment are put in place.

Equally important, I believe, is the public trust piece which has been in the news a lot lately - perhaps not those words, public trust. It is not just about government - in fact, I would say more so industry - but it is about government and industry working together to ensure that public trust is there with the communities that they are involved with every day. A big part of that is communication and engagement with local residents who are impacted on a day-to-day basis. It's not an easy slog, sometimes, but in my mind it's a two-pronged approach. It's that approach of dealing with the community and developing that level of trust and also an education process that folks truly understand what is meant when you talk about an aquaculture business or endeavour.

MR. MAGUIRE: I want to shift gears for a second. I heard from local fishers about potential federal policy change around cusk and the impact that could have on the groundfisheries. I'd like to know where we're at on that, how those discussions have evolved. Did you listen to the local Nova Scotia fishers and advocate on their behalf, or did you kind of side with the federal government on this? It does have a potential to have a fairly large impact on our lobsters, in particular.

MR. OSBORNE: Certainly cusk is an important issue in the lobster fishery and there have been concerns for some time around potential listing of cusk and a lot of discussion has gone on around that. The issue for the lobster fisheries is one of bycatch. A lot of questions have been raised around the science that's used to assess the level of the cusk stocks.

In reference to an earlier question, the department's role of how we look at these things is that it is a provincial interest that we look at. We look at the best available science, we look at the questions around that science if there are questions about it, and we look at the economic impact to the province. The positions we take are a combination of all those things.

In looking at the cusk question, there were credible questions about the cusk assessment. Industry certainly raised a lot of questions about the numbers that the federal

government was using and the department certainly, in putting its view forward to the federal government, expressed some of those concerns, as well as expressed what the significant potential impact economically to the province could be, on the lobster fishery in particular, depending on what the federal government would do around protecting cusk.

MR. MAGUIRE: The question is, where are we on this? Has the federal government made a decision? If they have, are you pleased with the decision they made? Do you think the interest in the fishers of Nova Scotia has been adequately represented by your department?

MR. OSBORNE: Yes, I think Nova Scotia's economic - I mean, we also have a role to play or an interest in cusk as a species as well and sustainability, so we do need to take a balanced approach. I think the department was satisfied with the information we received from industry and looking at science and we were satisfied that there were credible questions to be asked around that science.

I can get you an update on exactly where the . . .

MR. MAGUIRE: I'd love that.

MR. OSBORNE: That is a federal government matter, where the federal government is at with respect to cusk.

MR. MAGUIRE: I suspect someone from the federal government is actually watching us because my phone just rang and it was someone from the federal government. (Interruption) I thank Tim for his two cents, as usual.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. Please continue with the questioning.

MR. MAGUIRE: I'd appreciate if you'd keep the chirping to a minimum also, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. MAGUIRE: When it comes to the lobster levy, this was a contentious issue when it was first introduced and I certainly heard a lot about it locally. Do you feel that you adequately consulted with the fishers right across Nova Scotia? Are there any plans to impose this or, like you said earlier, are we just going to leave it up to the industry to decide, we're going to let them self-regulate this and go it if they want and, if they don't, it's up to them.

MR. FRANK DUNN: It would be the latter. We have no intention of imposing a levy at this time. It's in the hands of the industry to decide how they want to proceed.

MR. MAGUIRE: Do you foresee any impact on our agriculture and fisheries with Trump's protectionist policies? Do you have a plan in place in case we are negatively impacted by any policies that may be rolled out in the coming future?

MR. FRANK DUNN: As I mentioned earlier, we don't have particular direct contact with those . . .

MR. MAGUIRE: Are you speaking to the feds about this?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Yes, we have been talking to the federal government about this. Global Affairs Canada are dealing with the Department of Commerce. Their colleagues in the United States have expressed our concern, particularly around NAFTA and free trade and the desire to ensure that agreement continues. We're always looking to ensure that we can get the best deal possible when it comes to exports out of Canada in general, and specifically exports from Nova Scotia. So there's ongoing dialogue through IGA, which deals with Global Affairs Canada on the file.

MR. MAGUIRE: How much can be offset by the growth in the Asian market?

MR. FRANK DUNN: It's no secret that when we talk about seafood or agriculture products, the majority of our exports are into the United States. That's not to say that there is not an opportunity here to look at the Asian market - not just from a fish or seafood perspective or an agriculture perspective. The government in general has looked at a Nova Scotia-China economic growth strategy. I know the Premier has been there. This is about looking at other markets and, in some ways, diversifying a little bit.

Mr. Osborne mentioned earlier that our minister has been to Asia on a number of occasions. We are dealing now with a company in China called Alibaba, which is a major online seller of product. We are involved in a pilot project with three lobster processors in Nova Scotia to deliver 300,000 live premium lobster through the Chinese market. As I mentioned earlier, our key is premium product at a premium price. The middle class in Asia has expanded greatly in the last little while, and we see a lot of opportunity in Asia. So that's one example of where we're tapping into that market.

MR. MAGUIRE: We've heard some good stories here today. What is your department doing to promote these good-news stories - whether it's the apples, the wine industry, the lobster - locally, nationally and internationally, aside from the new brand?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Sorry, I didn't get the last part. Besides?

MR. MAGUIRE: Besides the creation of this new brand that you have. What are you doing to show the world that we are leaders in these industries - when it comes to apples, wine and lobster, to have Nova Scotia on the forefront of their mind?

MR. FRANK DUNN: There's a couple questions there. Maybe to be specific, on the lobster file or the seafood file generally, the new brand aside, we and staff attend numerous trade shows over the run of the year marketing our product. I know that my minister has been a strong advocate of exporting Nova Scotia seafood and agriculture around the world. He has actually visited these countries and takes a keen personal interest in advocating for Nova Scotia products.

You had mentioned wine. I describe wine as an industry that's in its infancy. There's a \$12 million program over four years to develop that industry. I can tell you that part of that money this year was \$150,000 to start looking at export development. It's not only the government that can promote our products. It's also the industry that can promote products as well.

On the agriculture side in general, I can tell you that we have a close working relationship with Taste of Nova Scotia, which are strong supporters of . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I'm sorry. Time has expired. We'll move back to the PC caucus, Mr. Houston, for 14 minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: In 2016, there were about 24,000 hives used mostly in the blueberry industry in the province. This year, it's forecast that the required number of hives is much lower. In fact, I'm hearing that there are a lot of hives that will go unrented this year in the province. Is there a surplus of hives in the province for the coming year?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Robichaud.

MS. LORETTA ROBICHAUD: I wouldn't suggest that there's a surplus of hives in the province. Hives are used for two purposes: for honey production and for pollination. It is the added value of being able to rent your hive out for pollination that attracts additional revenue for the beekeepers.

We have been undergoing an expansion program in the province as the blueberry industry required additional pollination services. With the downturn in the price of blueberries, the requirement for the number of hives for that industry has decreased this year. But that doesn't suggest that we have an overabundance of hives. It just means that they will not be rented out to the degree that they have been historically.

MR. HOUSTON: The province invested in getting more hives here. I think that pollination expansion program was about \$1 million, so the province made an investment to get more hives here, to have more hives available for pollination purposes. There are hives here that could pollinate that will go - so you're saying you don't believe there's a surplus of hives for pollination purposes?

MS. ROBICHAUD: I'm suggesting that there are other uses for the hives. If they're not utilized for pollination, it doesn't necessarily directly equate that we have a surplus.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, would you say there are enough hives in the province to meet the pollination requirements for the year?

MS. ROBICHAUD: For this current year, yes.

MR. HOUSTON: Do we have the small hive beetle in Nova Scotia?

MS. ROBICHAUD: We do not have any detection of small hive beetle in the province.

MR. HOUSTON: Do they have the small hive beetle in Ontario?

MS. ROBICHAUD: They do.

MR. HOUSTON: Did the department issue a permit to import hives into Nova Scotia to be used for pollination purposes for this year?

MS. ROBICHAUD: Applications are due by March 1st, with the issuing of the permits later in the year. There is an application before the department for the importation of hives, but there is no issuance of permit to date.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you suspect that permit will be issued? Is there a possibility that the permit could be issued for the importation of hives for the purpose of pollination, with knowledge of the fact that there are sufficient hives in the province to meet the pollination requirements, and in light of the fact that they would be imported from an area that's known to have the small hive beetle into our province which does not? Is it possible that a permit could be imported under those circumstances to import hives? I see the deputy wants to answer.

MR. FRANK DUNN: If I could respond, I think the honourable member is talking about some recent news media around importation of hives into Nova Scotia. To answer his question, yes, it's possible. If hives were imported in from Ontario, it would be a business decision from the applicant to do so.

I know there was mention in the questions of the small hive beetle. I can tell you that we have an import protocol around importing bees into the province. We're aware that there's the small hive beetle in Ontario. We have a bee expert which travels to Ontario when there is a plan to import hives into Nova Scotia. He is an expert in the field.

MR. HOUSTON: Who pays for that inspection? If a permit is approved - and it sounds like it probably will be - to import hives into the province from an area that's known to have the small hive beetle, the hives are going to be inspected before they're trucked here and they're going to be inspected by our bee expert, by the sounds of it. Who is going to pay for that?

MR. FRANK DUNN: It would be the Department of Agriculture.

MR. HOUSTON: Shouldn't that be part of the application process that the applicant should be able to certify that at their cost - that it wouldn't put our bee colony at risk of the small hive beetle? How much will it cost the department to have those hives inspected before they're shipped here?

MS. ROBICHAUD: The arrangement for payment is through our partnership with the Wild Blueberry Producers Association that is also supportive of hives coming into the province. The cost for this year's inspection is \$8,000, which will see four inspectors go to Ontario - two from government and two from industry.

MR. HOUSTON: Is it okay with you that the taxpayers pay for that, in light of the fact that there are sufficient hives here to pollinate? It's just a decision that somebody wants to bring them here - a business decision, I think you referred to it as. Is that okay that the taxpayers - is it common for the taxpayers to pay to send people to inspect product elsewhere before it comes into Nova Scotia? It's pretty unique, right?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can't comment on whether it's a common practice. I can say it is the Department of Agriculture's responsibility to ensure that everything is done to ensure that bee importation into the province is done in a way that ensures that the small hive beetle does not get here, and I think as part of that it would be incumbent on us and not uncommon for us to pay for that. I would suggest that \$8,000 is a very small amount to pay to ensure that the small hive beetle is not in Nova Scotia.

MR. HOUSTON: Is it true that if an entity wants to import hives to Nova Scotia and they do that regularly every year - they import some - if they were to not import this year, do they never get to import again? Is there some continuity requirement on behalf of the department that you have to import them every year, otherwise you're probably going to lose your ability to import?

MS. ROBICHAUD: No, it is an annual application process.

MR. HOUSTON: And each application is distinct?

MS. ROBICHAUD: Absolutely.

MR. HOUSTON: I do want to ask maybe a couple of yes or no questions, and I'll try to frame them as such, if that's okay.

Cabbage farmers in the province feel like they're being dumped on with cabbage from areas like Ontario and Quebec that have higher subsidies. The minister did a report analysis a couple of years ago that said, no, in fact, it's not to do with the subsidies - it's in fact that there's higher yields in those areas. Cabbage farmers in Nova Scotia find it hard to believe that the farmers in Ontario and Quebec are better farmers than them.

So I would like to ask about the report that said that it has to do with yields - there is a report that exists, I'm led to believe. Is that a report that you can provide to the committee? Can we get that report?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Yes.

MR. HOUSTON: I'm sure the clerk will take note of that. Under the bilateral agreements in place, has the Department of Agriculture made any applications for federal infrastructure money to address the protection of Nova Scotia farmland from rising sea levels? Specifically, the rising sea levels threaten some of our existing dikes, and when dikes breach it's pretty expensive - we've seen that in areas like Truro.

Has any application been made for federal infrastructure money to improve the dike system in Nova Scotia? Has an application been made?

MS. ROBICHAUD: Yes, under the ag-rivers program, the federal program that was launched through our Land Protection section in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, we have made an application and we're successful in the first round of multi-year program approval to address flood mitigation concerns for the province.

MR. HOUSTON: So it has been approved?

MS. ROBICHAUD: It has. Year one has been approved.

MR. HOUSTON: How much money will that bring to Nova Scotia to address it?

MS. ROBICHAUD: It's \$1 million in the first year.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. I do want to talk about aquaculture, specifically shellfish aquaculture. You mentioned earlier that there's a third party panel that has been established to look at aquaculture applications and amendments to existing ones. Are you talking finfish, are you talking shellfish, or are you talking both - the third party panel?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Both.

MR. HOUSTON: Are you at liberty to say who is on that panel or how big that panel is?

MR. FRANK DUNN: If I can remember the names. I believe Jean McKenna is the Chair, and I'm looking to - we can provide them to you.

MR. HOUSTON: You can provide it. It's an active panel? It's doing work already, looking at applications and stuff?

MR. FRANK DUNN: They haven't actually looked at applications yet. They've only been appointed I think in the last month or two months. There's a process of bringing them up to speed on the process and a bit of an education process on the aquaculture file.

MR. HOUSTON: So no applications are being approved for shellfish aquaculture until that panel is up and running?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: New applications - certain applications go to the panel, and certain types of applications would go to the aquaculture administrator. New marine shellfish and finfish applications would go to the panel.

MR. HOUSTON: New ones, okay. What about amendments for people who have a lease already? I'm thinking of oysters. They're trying to amend their lease to allow them to use the Vexar bags, which are pretty necessary in their business. That would be an amendment to a lease, I guess?

MR. OSBORNE: That would go to the aquaculture administrator.

MR. HOUSTON: Is the administrator approving amendments? Sometimes I hear there's a moratorium, sometimes I hear there's not a moratorium, or there's kind of a moratorium. Where are we at with that? Is there a moratorium?

MR. OSBORNE: The administrator is in place and doing the work that the regulations have assigned to the administrator. As an example, I think there have been 50 renewals under the new system. In the new renewal system, those renewals that don't require an amendment go to the administrator. There has been 50 of those. That's the new system that has public input, posting on the website of those sites that are to be renewed or amended. Public input is sought. The decisions of the administrator are posted online as well, and the rationale for that decision of the administrator is posted there as well. It's on the department's website.

MR. HOUSTON: Our oysters are second to none. It's a premium product. What we've seen is, in New Brunswick, the growth of their shellfish industry has been huge. Ours hasn't. We've got to get our act together on some of this stuff, for sure.

In terms of oysters, has the department given any thought to a seed hatchery? They need access to seed, and they have to get it from P.E.I. or New Brunswick in many cases right now. You can't always rely on natural spat collection. Is there any discussion of a seed hatchery?

MR. OSBORNE: With respect to oysters - oyster seed and oyster development - there was the challenge of an oyster disease that significantly impacted the oyster industry in Nova Scotia. To rebuild that sector, one of the things is to address that disease and work

on disease-resistant strains of oysters. We've been focusing a lot of work in that area to make sure that the seed we would then use will survive and grow, and we can carry on and rebuild the industry.

There have been discussions around a hatchery. I can't say that we're looking at a particular proposal for a hatchery. It is something that is a private sector interest primarily.

MR. HOUSTON: Are there programs available? Would there be any funding available that you can think of, even through a federal program, to establish a hatchery in Nova Scotia?

MR. OSBORNE: Right now, we have an aquaculture R&D fund of \$2 million, and we're using that fund to look at addressing those strategic bottleneck issues for species. Oysters is one of our priority focus species in the province for shellfish.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, time has expired. We'll move back to the NDP caucus and Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: It's great to see you all here today. Thank you very much for answering our questions.

The current government has been talking about working with the industry stakeholders in agriculture to create a provincial agricultural land preservation plan, to be complemented with easements through an agriculture land trust. Could you please provide us with an update on this?

[10:26 a.m. Mr. Iain Rankin assumed the Chair.]

MR. WALKER: We have been working with both the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture and the Annapolis Valley Farmland Trust down in the Valley. There's currently a committee that has been struck to look at some recommendations that came out of an internal report that we put together.

MS. ZANN: So when was the board meeting and who was at the board meeting, did you say?

MR. WALKER: The committee that prepared the report included the Federation of Agriculture, the Annapolis Valley Farmland Trust, and representatives from the department.

MS. ZANN: Right, and when was that?

MR. WALKER: The report was done last year and so the follow-up to the report is to bring together a working group with the Federation of Agriculture to examine the options and recommendations in that report.

MS. ZANN: So when is the working group going to be going ahead, did you say?

MR. WALKER: The terms of reference have just been created so we expect that in the next month or so that that committee will come together.

MS. ZANN: So we'll be hearing more over the next month about when they're going to meet.

MR. WALKER: Yes.

MS. ZANN: And is this going to be an ongoing process for like a year, or for a few months? What are you foreseeing?

MR. WALKER: I would anticipate, I mean there has been a lot of work done in this area and there's some fairly good recommendations in the internal report that was done so I wouldn't expect it to be too long a process.

MS. ZANN: I'm sorry, I couldn't hear that last part.

MR. WALKER: It wouldn't be too long a process so I wouldn't say more than a year.

MS. ZANN: Okay, so approximately over a year, though?

MR. WALKER: Yes.

MS. ZANN: Okay, thank you very much. Also, during the NDP's time in government I remember that we were all very proud that we were the only province in Canada to keep increasing farms here, as opposed to the other provinces.

The current government has promised work with stakeholders to create a strategic plan that would increase the number of new farmers entering the industry. Can you give us an update on that strategic plan and provide us with some specific numbers about how many new farmers have entered the industry in Nova Scotia since 2013, when the government took office?

MS. ROBICHAUD: I'll have to get you the exact number on the increase. We were the only province trending, as you are aware, with an increase in farm numbers, kind of bucking the trend across the country. Our initiatives still continue under FarmNEXT and THINKFARM in the current policy framework with our federal partners. Under our next policy framework we will look at what the evolution of the THINKFARM program will look like. That will feed into the strategy and our efforts continue to increase farm numbers.

We've just completed work around barriers to growth for the 60 per cent of our farms that are below the income threshold to actually generate an income that would be sustainable long term, so that will feed into that work as well.

I'll get those numbers. I don't have them today, but they would not be as high as they were when we were trending upwards, I do know that.

MS. ZANN: So is there a plan to try and increase the numbers still and get more people coming from Europe, for instance, starting farms? I know that part of the program was to try and attract young families who want to get into the farming business because a lot of the new generation aren't necessarily wanting to take their parents' farms.

MS. ROBICHAUD: Exactly, that's part of the barriers to growth - the determination on why they are not willing to take the farms. But yes, the initiatives do still continue under THINKFARM and our partners on attracting new farmers to Nova Scotia, not only internationally but from other parts of the country.

Those efforts continue, and we have interprovincial discussions around attraction as well. Wine has been a good area where we've attracted new entrants into farming, as it relates to grape production. That would be just one example.

MS. ZANN: That's good. Is there anything in place right now to help with the transition over from one generation to the next for taking on the farm?

MS. ROBICHAUD: Succession planning has been an issue for young farmers wanting to take over operations. We have worked very diligently with the Federation of Agriculture, housed in Truro, to come up with workshops and initiatives, and provide coaching and counselling around the legal requirements to make that happen.

It has been very positive. There has been a lot of attendance at these workshops and sessions. Dialogue is continuing around how we might be able to make that something that's more accessible, whether it's a live module where you go for information or a live session. It is recognized as one of those barriers, but there has been tremendous work taking place.

MS. ZANN: Good. I'm glad to hear that, thank you. I'll be looking forward to seeing what is the outcome of that.

I know one of my colleagues had asked about bees, but I would also like to follow on that. I've been hearing from the Nova Scotia Beekeepers Association that they have been actually pressing the Department of Agriculture to not issue importation permits for beehives from Ontario because of the small hive beetle threat or the Varroa mite, which is a huge colony disorder. It's very dangerous for the bees and kills all the worker bees over the winter, as you probably know, and over the Fall while they're hibernating, just leaving the queen with a bunch of honey and no workers.

The president of the Nova Scotia Beekeepers' Association says that she was actually informed by the department that a permit will be issued for one truckload of bees from Ontario. She has actually said that this is going to happen, she was told. Can you confirm if that's correct? If so, could you please explain the rationale for allowing this one truckload of those bees?

MS. ROBICHAUD: The application is in. The actual issuance of the permit has not taken place. There is nothing currently that would prevent that from happening, to answer your question. But they are not in possession of the permit currently.

To address the notion of the small hive beetle and the concern raised by the Beekeepers' Association, the minister did commission a study to assess the risk of the introduction of small hive beetles if the border remained open into Nova Scotia and permits continued to be issued. We had the results of that scientific study completed and presented to all interested stakeholders and parties, which assessed the risk as being low for the introduction of small hive beetle into the province.

In addition, we released new protocol for 2017 with heightened requirements on inspection before any hives could be brought in via truckload to the province. So we're also demonstrating increased due diligence on inspection protocol, and 100 per cent of all hives coming into the province will be inspected.

The other really nice part about the partnership on this is last year and again this year is, we had parties join the inspection team from industry so that they could also learn and be educated on what small hive beetle actually looks like because we don't have it here, and they've never seen it. There was an educational component, and that demonstrated the commitment of government to take those individuals with us to Ontario to do those inspections.

Lots of effort is taking place both on extension and on mitigation of the potential for the small hive beetle to be introduced.

MS. ZANN: My question would be, since there already is this small hive beetle - or the Varroa mite, as it's called, Varroa destructor - in existence in Ontario, why are we even considering trucking in any bees from Ontario at this point in time? If we're going to have to bring some in, why not bring them in from somewhere else where that beetle is not even a problem? It's so dangerous, it can wipe out an entire bee colony in a very short amount of time. I think I heard you say earlier that we may have enough bees for this season. I don't know why we would take that chance.

It's the same with beef. When there seems to be a beef disease, people don't bring in beef from that province. So why are we considering bringing them in and spending the money to check them out instead of just bringing in bees from somewhere else?

MS. ROBICHAUD: This is a business relationship with Ontario that has been in existence for a number of years. They are a very good province to work with. It is unfortunate that they do have regions that are positive for small hive beetle currently, but it is also a business transaction on where the hives come in from.

Ontario has a system in place where we can work very collaboratively with their inspectors on the ground. Not every province would accommodate Nova Scotia's request to fly people in to go to every farm to re-inspect what Ontario inspectors have already inspected. They are very accommodating in that light. Not all provinces would be that receptive, nor are all provinces in a position that there is no detection of small hive beetle. So there's various components to it, but there's also a relationship and an establishment of working very closely, to the benefit of the industry here, on allowing us to come in and inspect at to own standards.

MS. ZANN: The other thing I wanted to mention when it comes to bees is also glyphosate and the fact that many people are concerned about glyphosate's effect on our pollinators. Last year, the Environment Department allowed for a lot of spraying to be done by the forestry industry here in Nova Scotia, and people were very concerned about killing off bee populations and also making them sick.

In America, statistics show that when they test honey coming from the United States, it's full of glyphosate. A number of beekeepers here in Nova Scotia have been talking to me about the fact that they are concerned about their bees and their bees flying out into the lands that have been sprayed. A number of beekeepers have said they are making an effort to put their bees on lands that are nowhere near anything that is being sprayed, and they are advertising their honey as such.

Along with that idea, I'm also hearing that there are genetically modified alfalfa seeds that are going to be coming here for sale in Nova Scotia. I asked Minister Colwell that question last year in the Spring, about whether or not we were going to be having these genetically modified alfalfa seeds coming to Nova Scotia. He didn't know the answer at that time. The National Farmers Union has protested against the introduction of these GMO seeds here in Canada.

Have you received any feedback yet from the beekeepers about their concerns about glyphosate spraying? Also have you heard any feedback from farmers in Nova Scotia about the introduction of genetically modified seeds?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn, you have 30 seconds.

MR. FRANK DUNN: On the glyphosate issue, I think it's important for folks in the room to know that glyphosate is approved by the federal government and is approved .

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MS. ZANN: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but because we don't have much time, the World Health Organization has deemed it as a probable carcinogen, and they've reiterated that just recently. There are varying reports out there, and people are very concerned.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Would you like to finish your comments there before we move to the Liberal caucus, Mr. Dunn?

MR. FRANK DUNN: That's fine, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Ms. Lohnes-Croft for 14 minutes.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you, and I'm happy to be here today. I'm going to switch the theme a little bit here. Being a rural MLA, I like to talk about some of the things going on in my constituency. I have Highway No. 103 in my constituency, and if you are driving down it, you see these beautiful, big blue signs speaking to the great tourism of Mahone Bay and Lunenburg, Home of the *Bluenose II*.

I want to speak to another big blue sign which is the Lunenburg County Balsam Fir Christmas Tree Capital of the World sign. That's not a message that I've heard here. They are great exporters in our province. Over the years, they've had their ups and downs. Recently I think they've seen a bit of a turn, which is very positive.

I just recently attended the Lunenburg County Christmas Tree Producers Association Spring technical session, and I was really pleased to see how far the SMART Tree Program has come here in Nova Scotia. I'd like you to speak to the project, its success and its timelines because I understand we're ready for these seedlings in two years.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Maybe I'll start and then perhaps turn it over to Ms. Robichaud. For those who don't know, the SMART Tree project is a project that involves the Christmas Tree Council, so industry and government and academia to do research to develop the Christmas tree that basically holds its needles for a longer period of time. In this particular case, we're looking at something around 90 days.

Christmas trees are a big industry in Nova Scotia, particularly in certain ridings in Nova Scotia. I can give you an example; I was in Louisiana shortly after Christmas this year and there were a number of Christmas trees that were out by the wayside to be picked up by the local garbage collection. I asked them questions and I came to find out that the Christmas trees in Louisiana were actually Christmas trees from Nova Scotia.

They were somewhat brown so obviously we hadn't gotten to the SMART tree incidence yet. It's an important development because a lot of our Christmas tree exports go to places where folks normally would not expect Christmas trees to grow. We export our trees obviously to the U.S. but we export them to the Caribbean, to the Bahamas, to a number of southern jurisdictions. Obviously if you can grow a Christmas tree that retains

its green needles longer, when we're shipping them in some cases in October or November, it's another example of a premium product from Nova Scotia.

Around the specific details, I think I'll turn it over to Ms. Robichaud who will add some more comments.

MS. ROBICHAUD: Christmas trees have not really been that long under a commodity group with agriculture. I can remember working quite closely with them - it's got to be within the last decade - over getting recognition that this is a very valuable crop that is produced and harvested and sold much like any other agricultural crop. In that vein we had decided then that we would support the Christmas Tree Producers Association not only with some initial investment on formalizing the association but also with getting recognition through our Federation of Agriculture as a commodity in agriculture.

When that happened it was around the same time that the research was really getting underway for this project. The facility at the AgriTech Park in Bible Hill was retooled to actually house Dr. Lada at the time and his team to undertake this research. They had four very active labs, they still have four very active labs onsite there currently. I had the opportunity to tour them just a couple of weeks ago.

The work is tremendous and the research is demonstrating that they've really revitalized that industry in terms of competition from artificial trees, by ensuring that the needles could stay on longer and be exported earlier and still meet the Christmas timeline for that project.

We also recognize the importance of Christmas tree production by the recognition through being a commodity in agriculture, that it opened up the door for them in terms of accessing federal and provincial dollars through our policy framework. They have been fortunate as well through that relationship with Agriculture to have access to marketing programs and different programs that help support the development and marketing and market access of that industry.

The timelines for the project, I don't have exactly with me today - you raised that question, so I can certainly get that for you. I also want to indicate that there's a tremendous working relationship there with Dal AC, in collaboration with the Christmas Tree Council and the Department of Agriculture. I wanted to mention that because it's very important that the research continue in that particular area, for the longevity of that industry.

[10:42 a.m. Mr. Allan MacMaster resumed the Chair.]

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Can you speak a bit more to the partnership with the Lunenburg County Christmas Tree Producers Association? I understand they really grasped the goals of the Ivany report and they are a great example. We're always hearing that nothing is being done with the Ivany report or it's not meeting its goals. But here is

the partnership that these farmers have made with the Agricultural College, Dr. Raj. Could you speak to the investment that the Lunenburg County growers have made?

MS. ROBICHAUD: I'm not aware of the dollar value of the investment but I understand there was a very creative and innovative way of generating revenue to continue on with research. Again, I don't want to misquote myself, but each member contributing a certain percentage towards the work carrying on, which would be reflective of industry and government and academia partnering to the betterment of the Christmas Tree Council and the industry overall.

I don't know the exact dollar value of the investment, but I do understand that it was substantial.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Yes, and I understand that they sold shares within their group and beyond; I believe shares went for about \$500 apiece. I saw a presentation of two SMART Trees to the two big sellers who are farmers who have sold the most shares. There was some talk that each plant was worth so many million dollars because of the investment.

This speaks well to our industry and we're really hoping that it will move it forward. We take pride. We started the tree-to-Boston program in the 1970s and sent the first tree down to begin that tradition. I hope at the 100th Anniversary the Lunenburg County Christmas Tree Producers Association will be front and centre with the Christmas tree that will go to Boston this year.

We also had another great event which your department was involved with on the weekend, Agriculture Day. We've heard some that small farms aren't being bought up but I can tell you that on the South Shore, small farms are being bought up. Families aren't traditionally taking them over like they did, but we're getting a lot of people coming to Lunenburg County, having small farms. We see a big increase in local farm markets where people want to buy products.

We had Agriculture Day. Perennia was front and centre, offering so many resources to people and there to answer questions.

One of our other big success stories is LaHave Farms, with the Haskap berry. This is a wonderful story about foreign investors. They have brought in many people to Nova Scotia and have encouraged other people from Nova Scotia to buy plants, plant Haskap. Can you speak to the success of the Haskap berry and what it means for other people coming into Nova Scotia and investing?

MS. ROBICHAUD: Haskap is a real success story. When Haskap first came here, there was certainly a lot of workshops and dialogue at the time to determine if this was actually a berry that could be produced here because its native roots are not from here; very different than a wild blueberry.

The department invested quite heavily and worked very much collaboratively with the investors at the time to demonstrate that it was a viable crop, that it could be produced here. There was a lot of spinoffs of that because the model is a little bit different in that there are grower members who feed into somewhat of a co-op model for Haskap.

The real success story I find in addition to the grower model that was developed was the partnership that came from that with Dal AC on the nutraceutical side of Haskap. So not only were you producing a crop value adding it for your jams and jellies and all the great things that they produce, but also we worked jointly with them to secure some funding for research at the Dal AC campus on potential nutraceutical values of the derivatives from Haskap.

So in and of itself is another stream of revenue potentially for that crop, very much value added, taking it into a little bit of a different realm than agriculture. It demonstrates that there are real possibilities with a crop that go beyond value adding simply on the agricultural side, that there can be other uses as well. So yes, it's a real success story. We continue to work with them as well through our select buy local initiative and do lots of features with the Haskap growers on the products and how they can be used.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: On Tuesday, there was an announcement about improvements to rural Internet. I hear about that frequently, and the Haskap farm is an example of that - because of their need for high-speed Internet, they had to move their main operation into Mahone Bay, where they could get Fibre Op. A lot of their owners live in England and other countries, and communication is vital, plus connecting with buyers and sellers.

So this announcement to improve rural Internet is really going to help various industries, especially the agriculture industries. We're seeing small farms and small businesses popping up. I get daily calls about the lack of Internet and the slow Internet. How do you see announcements like this and the use of Internet as building on the agriculture that you already have?

MR. FRANK DUNN: The Internet is a perfect example of a tool, technology, that all our industries can use, both in agriculture and the seafood sector, to grow our markets. Innovation is an important thing, and innovation comes in many forms. But at its basic form, Fibre Op or Internet for companies in rural Nova Scotia is an innovation that we need. I believe it has been said that Internet access in rural areas is as much a right as anything to help grow the economy. I think it's a great thing, particularly for our rural areas.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I noticed many of our farmers have to make communications through the night when there aren't as many users on it. Sometimes Dr. Lada, who has been working on the SMART Tree, has responded immediately, so he's up in the middle of the night doing some of his work on the SMART Tree.

I think I've run out of time. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, time has just about expired. Thank you to our witnesses. Mr. Dunn, I'll allow you to make some closing comments.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to quickly thank the committee members today for questions on the seafood and agriculture sectors. I encourage everyone in the room to promote Nova Scotia products, whether it be in Nova Scotia, Canada, or across the country. We have a lot to be proud of. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

We do have some committee business. We have received some correspondence. I will go through them piece by piece. If there are any comments or questions, just let me know.

The first is from the Department of Municipal Affairs. This was information requested from the March 1st meeting, on equipment for first responders, the Emergency Services Provider fund. Are there any questions on that?

Hearing none, moving to the Department of Justice correspondence - this was additional information related to the Fisher Maritime consulting report. Any questions on that?

Hearing none, we'll move to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. There was a request for information, related to a meeting on February 8th on *Bluenose II*. The department has requested a two-week extension to respond to both questions that were outstanding. I just bring that to the committee's awareness as it is correspondence. Any questions or comments? No. Okay.

We have a request for clarification. I don't believe committee members have seen this, so I'm just going to read it very quickly. This was a request for information from the Department of Health and Wellness. The question that had been asked was, how much has the province paid to other jurisdictions in transfer payments to cover the cost of Nova Scotians going to other areas to get treatment? How much has Nova Scotia received from other provinces in return for services offered to people visiting our province?

The follow-up from Health and Wellness - they've come back to us and said the information we collected was specific to physicians, but we were asked to see if the panel wanted information related to hospitals as well. They have the information related to physicians. The question being asked of the committee is, would we like to see information related to hospitals as well, or is physicians sufficient? Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: I think we should get it for the hospital level as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other questions or comment? Hearing none, we'll ask our clerk to carry that response back to the Department of Health and Wellness.

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 5th. That is with the Department of Health and Wellness, and it is to discuss emergency department accountability and Collaborative Emergency Centres.

Is there any further business to come before the committee? Mr. Houston and then Ms. Zann.

MR. HOUSTON: I was looking at the schedule. I believe we have an opening on April 26th. It's an open day. We have meetings before that, and we have meetings after that. I would hate to see the committee miss a week just because of scheduling problems.

I would like to propose that we fill that week, that we ask Engage Nova Scotia to come before the committee. I would like to make a motion this morning. I move that Danny Graham, in his capacity as chief engagement officer with Engage Nova Scotia, appear before the Public Accounts Committee, along with the appropriate staff from Communities, Culture and Heritage, at the earliest opportunity, which would be April 26th. I would like to make that motion that the committee invite Danny Graham to appear before the Public Accounts Committee on April 26th.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Rankin.

MR. IAIN RANKIN: The standard practice of the committee is to put your items forward during agenda-setting. We did go around that for that same Party, the Progressive Conservative Party, the last time because they said it constituted an emergency. So we allowed the *Bluenose II* to come forward as a topic, and they took away one of their items in the last agenda setting.

I don't see any emergency or why we would circumvent the standard practice of this committee. That Party has an opportunity to put forward items, as do the other two Parties, in the next agenda-setting. I won't support any motion that circumvents the standard practice of the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: I understand Mr. Rankin's concern about the scheduling and which topics go forward. This is not about that. I would be happy to change a topic down the road, like we did with the *Bluenose II*. It's not an emergency either. I concede on both of those points. But we have a committee that has a mandate to meet and discuss the matters of public funds in this province. We have an open date. I don't see any reason why this committee should just take a week off when we have an opportunity to schedule the business of the province.

I would just suggest that we have an open date, let's fill it, and let's not get hung up on the red tape of when things are asked. It's almost a month away. Let's fill it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do I have permission for the committee to extend its time past 11:00 a.m.? (Interruptions) Okay, I'm not hearing consensus on that, so we have just a minute left.

There has been a motion put forward. (Interruptions) We have one minute left. There has been a motion put forth to call Engage Nova Scotia. Mr. Rankin.

MR. RANKIN: So you say that it's not an emergency. What gives one Party the right to pick the topic out of the three? What's stopping me from saying I want to bring in a different department to fill that topic?

MR. HOUSTON: Suggest your topic then.

MR. RANKIN: The point is that the Parties in this Legislature are equal in terms of who puts topics forward. We went around that process the last time. We accommodated the Progressive Conservative caucus for their item based on it being an emergency. I'm not willing to play political games just so we can fill a day that's a few weeks out and expect that we can arrange for our clerk to bring a witness into the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. With that, there's just seconds remaining. I now call this meeting adjourned because we have run out of time.

This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:00 a.m.]