

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, January 11, 2023**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Accountability Report and Management of Crown Lands**

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## **Public Accounts Committee**

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)  
Nolan Young (Vice-Chair)  
John A. MacDonald  
Melissa Sheehy-Richard  
Tom Taggart  
Kent Smith  
Hon. Brendan Maguire  
Susan Leblanc  
Kendra Coombes

[Hon. Brendan Maguire was replaced by Braedon Clark.]  
[Kendra Coombes was replaced by Gary Burrill.]

### In Attendance:

Kim Leadley  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Kim Adair,  
Auditor General

### WITNESSES

#### Department of Natural Resources and Renewables

Karen Gatien,  
Deputy Minister

Matt Parker,  
Executive Director - Forestry & Wildlife

Peter Geddes,  
Executive Director - Regional Services

Leslie Hickman,  
Executive Director - Land Services

Mike O'Brien,  
Executive Director - Finance & Treasury Board



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2023**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Hon. Kelly Regan

**VICE CHAIR**

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. I now call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. My name is Kelly Regan. I'm the MLA for Bedford Basin and the Chair of the committee.

A reminder to all our folks here today to place their phones on silent, and I'll ask committee members to introduce themselves, beginning with Mr. Young.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: On today's agenda, we have officials with us from the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables with respect to their accountability report and management of Crown lands.

I will ask the witnesses to introduce themselves. I'm going to go left to right. Mr. O'Brien.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I invite Deputy Minister Gatien to make her opening remarks.

KAREN GATIEN: Thank you, and good morning. First of all, I'd like to start by thanking you for the opportunity to speak with you about the many important initiatives that we're advancing at the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. Ultimately, our department is moving Nova Scotia toward a clean and renewable energy future, and protecting and managing the province's natural resources in a sustainable way.

When you look at the items in our mandate letter, which are also outlined in our last accountability report, you can see quite easily how they all align with this overarching description of our work. Naturally, we are at various stages of the work, but I'm happy to say that we are making progress on all fronts.

A transformative piece of this work is implementing recommendations from the forest practices review and adopting the triad model of ecological forestry on Crown land. This model divides Crown land into three zones that work together to balance diverse interests, and it prioritizes biodiversity. We're close to having this model fully in place, and we're committed to having at least 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's total land and water mass protected by 2030. We work closely on this goal with our colleagues at the Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Mi'kmaq on Indigenous-protected and conserved areas.

Our provincial parks also play a role in reaching this goal and they are a great opportunity for Nova Scotians to get outside and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of being in nature. They're also an important part of our tourism industry and the economy. Parks are one of our best examples of how we're taking action on the mandate direction for government to be inclusive and respectful of all demographic, cultural, and ethnic diversities. We've made accessibility upgrades and built gender-neutral washrooms at some parks, beaches and campgrounds, and we'll continue this kind of work over time.

Nova Scotia's parks and protected areas help conserve wildlife habitat. Last Spring, we amended the Wildlife Act to address the growing problems that are stemming from feeding wildlife. Soon, we'll start consultation on regulations to help us manage and reduce these instances of human-wildlife conflict. Our parks also help maintain essential ecosystems that can increase resilience against climate change. That leads me to share some highlights of the work we're doing to fight climate change.

A key commitment for us is to have 80 per cent of our electricity supplied by renewable energy by 2030. We are exploring all options to meet this goal while ensuring affordability for ratepayers. Some options include wind, solar, tidal, residuals from sustainably harvested wood, and the Maritime Link. We're also exploring the Atlantic Loop, which would require federal support to move forward.

As we green our grid, it is making more and more sense to also advance electric transportation. We're working with federal partners to help Nova Scotians make the switch to EVs through incentives and education. We're investing \$2.5 million this fiscal in

charging infrastructure. We've also been investing millions in programs to help Nova Scotians improve energy efficiency in their homes, businesses, and communities.

We're continuing them and increasing support significantly for low and middle income households with the \$140 million we announced in December. This money will also leverage millions more from the federal government. These programs reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help Nova Scotians keep more of their money.

We know our energy transformation will take time. While there are some actions that can and must be taken in the near future, there are more that we need to do to reach our goal of net zero by 2050. Green hydrogen and offshore wind are key areas to help us get there. That's why we aim to offer leases for five gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030.

All of this work not only helps fight climate change, but also helps grow our green economy here in Nova Scotia. Our thriving solar industry is creating jobs across the province, particularly in rural communities. Our green hydrogen industry is on the verge of becoming a key player in the global export market. We're working on a strategy to responsibly mine critical minerals needed for climate change technologies and keep the economic benefit of that value chain in Nova Scotia.

These are just a few examples of how our environment and our economy go hand in hand. As we advance this work, we are committed to protecting ratepayers as best we can and ensuring that they have access to clean, reliable, and affordable electricity. We're continuing to look at options to help keep life affordable for Nova Scotians.

Much of the work we do involves the use of our Crown lands. I know people tend to think of Crown land as all land owned by government. Technically, Crown lands are those that we manage under the Crown Lands Act and they make up about 26 per cent of the province. About 9 per cent of Nova Scotia is managed by the Department of Environment and Climate Change under the legislation for protected areas, and our department helps support their work to designate new areas.

This only adds up to 35 per cent, so you can see that the vast majority of our land in Nova Scotia is actually private. Government works very hard to balance all the competing interests for this publicly owned land.

Within our department, we have biologists, foresters, geologists, and other experts. They work through a formal process to consider a wide range of social, environmental, and economic benefits associated with the use of publicly-owned land, both today and in the future. These lands belong to all of us and ensuring that Nova Scotians get the optimum benefit from them is always our goal as we manage them.

We're a sizable department with a broad mandate, so I can't possibly address everything in my opening remarks. I'm going to leave it there, but we will certainly do our best to answer your questions as fully as we can.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister Gatien. I will just pause here and let Mr. MacDonald introduce himself.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Madam Chair, I apologize for being late. I'm John A. MacDonald, the MLA for Hants East.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald. I would note that officials from the Auditor General's Office, the Legislative Counsel Office, Hansard, and Legislative Committees Office are in attendance today at the meeting as well.

This is the point where we open the floor for questions. We'll do 20 minutes with each caucus. Just so our witnesses know, if the 20 minutes elapses while you're in the middle of a full flight of rhetoric, I will cut you off. I'm not being rude. I'm just trying to be fair to each of the caucuses, so they get their full 20 minutes.

With that, it is now 9:09. We will begin with the Liberal caucus. Mr. Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: Thank you all again for being here - some familiar faces here. I spent some time in the department working for a former minister, so I know it's a wonderful department that does a lot of really important work. I'm not just buttering you up - I really do believe that. I thank you all for that and for being here today.

I wanted to touch on something that I think is maybe a bit underappreciated - you did mention it in your opening remarks, Deputy Minister Gatien. That's around critical minerals. We all love our cellphones and we all want to see everybody driving electric vehicles in five, 10, or 15 years. We want to transition to a net-zero economy, provincially and globally, of course. But to do that will require extensive use of a very old technology, which is mining, of course.

We know we have critical minerals here in Nova Scotia, that we could be, I believe, taking advantage of and really accessing. We know that the world needs them, so they're going to get mined somewhere. It might be in a place that doesn't have the safety or environmental regulations that we would have here in Nova Scotia.

Other provinces - Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, and others - have released strategies on critical minerals and how they're going to access and use those resources in their provinces. You mentioned that briefly in your opening remarks, Deputy Minister Gatien, so could you maybe just elaborate on where that process is within the department, and if it's something that is actively being developed? Will we see critical minerals being mined here in Nova Scotia, in the short to medium term?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Gatién.

KAREN GATIEN: The short answer is yes, we are looking at what the possibilities are for Nova Scotia. Where we're at right now - as you may or may not be aware, the federal government announced a critical mineral strategy as well and some funding aligned with that. Our Geoscience and Mines Branch is looking hard at what the opportunities are there, and then doing an assessment in terms of the critical minerals that are available in Nova Scotia, and developing a way forward, a possible strategy - having some conversations at this point, working with the feds to see what the opportunities are in terms of leveraging federal funding to help support our work as well.

We're hoping to be able to present some options to government likely through the Winter, possibly early Spring. It's pretty close. It will be government's decision whether or not that's the way forward, but we felt it was important for us to look at it and see if there is a way that we can - I'm going to use the word modernize. I don't know that the geologists in the department would necessarily agree with me, but if there are ways that we can move forward to have sustainable, environmentally sensitive, green mining. There are jurisdictions that do green mining as well. What are the options in terms of that and really leveraging critical minerals?

As you say, we want to also keep the benefits of the supply chain here in Nova Scotia and do it safely - not just for workers, but also for the environment. It should be through the Winter, early Spring.

BRAEDON CLARK: You touched on another piece that I wanted to ask about, which is an assessment of what we have and where it is - which is always the most important thing when you're talking about mining: what do we have and where is it? Prospectors are out there, I'm sure.

Does the department have funding - or will they access funding through the feds, for example - to really do a province-wide assessment so that the department and everybody really knows this is what we have in terms of critical minerals and this is where it is, so we can obviously plan appropriately for what we might want to see in the future? Is that going to happen?

KAREN GATIEN: Yes. Whether we need federal funding to do that or not remains to be seen. Certainly, I think the team already has a good sense of where critical minerals are available, but they would do further. That's part of it, for the research and for the exploration - what the opportunities are and what that might look like.

There may be some that, because of the way they're mined, we might decide that's not really something that's viable for Nova Scotia. We have significant population density in the province, so there are some types of mining that are maybe more challenging than others, but we'll look at all of that through that process.

BRAEDON CLARK: Going through the accountability report, another thing that was mentioned was the issue of strengthening confidence in the mining sector. That could mean for the public. That could mean for the industry. That could mean for government. That means for everybody who's involved in the mining industry or who has an interest or a stake in it. When we as a caucus speak to representatives from the mining industry, there's a sense that the confidence level is not there at the moment.

We've had one operational gold mine in Nova Scotia for the last few years. Beyond that, of course, it's always a sensitive and difficult issue when you're dealing with a natural resource project of any kind, really. Mining in particular, I would say, given some of the historical facts and mistakes that have been made in this province and elsewhere.

Deputy Minister Gatién, how would you assess the confidence that the industry should have in the future of mining in Nova Scotia? Is it something that we should be optimistic about, or is it something that remains to be seen and we might perhaps be putting the brakes on it a little bit?

KAREN GATIÉN: At this point I would say they should be optimistic. It doesn't mean it won't look a bit different. Critical minerals is a great example, where we're looking at opportunities - if there are ways to mine waste for value, old sites where there are tailings. The critical minerals are within the tailings; they just didn't know they needed them back then.

So, we're looking at green mining, as I mentioned, all of the opportunities. We're talking with the sector to ask, what is it you'd like to hear and know, and understand from us as well? Also, what do we need to hear and know from you? We're hoping that they'll feel optimistic that Nova Scotia is open for business, but that it will have to be sustainable mining, and that there'll be a rigorous environmental process that they'll have to undertake. I don't think that's a surprise to anyone, but that we are interested in seeing the future of mining for Nova Scotia, for sure.

BRAEDON CLARK: Also curious about the issue of abandoned mines. My colleague to my left here from the Eastern Shore - there are some historical mines in his neck of the woods, and all over this province. Whereas I mentioned earlier, 100 years ago we had really no understanding - or interest in some cases - in protecting the environment when it came to mining operations.

I understand there is a liability associated with that for the Province. Does the department have a sense of what that liability looks like, province-wide? Has that assessment been done? Or is it one or two, maybe, when there's really dozens of sites that could fall into that category?

KAREN GATIÉN: I live in Dartmouth, very close to Montague Gold Mines, so it's very familiar to me as well. I'll start, but Peter is our lead on this work.

[9:15 a.m.]

We have a list. There was a list of 69, and we've got it down to 60 in terms of - they're doing assessments as they go, kind of, okay, there's no risk there, so we're down to 60. There are two, as you would know - Montague and I can't remember the name of the other one. I know I have it in my head; it just blanked. We're doing some in-depth work with those, and then there's some five more that we just put forward to do some further assessments, and the work continues.

It's pretty complex, but you're right. We're taking it seriously. We're trying to figure out, okay, where do we need to focus first, what are the most likely high risk, and then kind of do - I don't want to use the term desktop assessment, but it's kind of how I have it in my head. It's sort of a first assessment and then we'll dig deeper.

Peter, do you want to more clearly, maybe, explain that? (Laughter)

PETER GEDDES: Sure. On the question of the liability, there's \$118 million that's booked for the department for liability for abandoned mine sites right now, and that's broken down into the two sites that are most advanced, that we've done a fair bit of work on. One is in Montague Gold Mines, as the deputy minister mentioned; the other one is Goldenville which is in Guysborough County. Beyond that, there were several more that we did Environmental Site Assessments on last year, where we were able to book some numbers for liability, as well - six additional sites there.

The other thing we've done is book some funds to essentially do assessments for the remaining sites, so that's what makes up the bulk of that \$115 million. We know we're going to have to work through assessments for a whole lot of these sites. The good news is that we're kind of working the list of sites from both ends. There's some that from a desktop review and just digging into old files, we can start to determine if there really was no activity on a site that would have likely resulted in contaminations of concern that we would have to do remediations. We've been able to start to drop them off the list without doing any real significant work.

At the same time, on the other end of the spectrum, there are ones that we know for sure have contamination based on the type of activity that occurred there. They'll need detailed assessments, and at some point in time, they'll need strategies which will include either management of the site as is, or potentially remediation of the site. Right now, the total book liability is around \$150 million for that package.

BRAEDON CLARK: So, \$115 million or so from sites. Is there any desktop, perhaps, or estimate of what the total liability looks like? Obviously, it must be hundreds of millions of dollars, I assume, because we're already past \$100 million. Is there any idea of what that liability overall looks like, or do we just not know at this point?

PETER GEDDES: No, we don't have an overall number. That is one of the things that the Auditor General actually asked us: whether or not we could use some of the early sites like the Goldenville and Montague Gold Mines, where we had some assessments of remediation costs, and do a projection across all the remaining sites.

It's way too complicated for that, unfortunately, and there're different types of mine sites, as well, which pose different types of risks and issues. The number will go up, I can assure you of that, but I don't think we can even give an order of magnitude with confidence at this point in time.

BRAEDON CLARK: I appreciate that. Very few of them are similar in those ways, and as you say, there are different levels of contaminations and issues. The local geology and environment have an impact on that as well. I appreciate that, and I hope that in the future, as we move forward, that number gets refined further and further. It's really important, from not just a financial lens, of course, but an environmental and social justice point of view as well.

I just wanted to ask as well, on a slightly different topic, around renewables. We all know that the target is 80 per cent renewable by 2030. Obviously, I don't need to remind anybody that there have been a lot of maybe hurt feelings and strong feelings around power rates, bond ratings and so on, and the future of some of these projects as they relate to Nova Scotia Power and legislation that the government has passed on this issue.

I'm wondering about the 80 per cent renewable target by 2030. Is that achievable without the Atlantic Loop project?

KAREN GATIEN: At this point, we believe it can be. Just to run through, we're at 30 per cent now. We just completed a request for proposals for wind. That's about another 12 per cent with those five projects. Solar is about 2 per cent when the Maritime Link fully flows - that's roughly another 10 per cent. Then there's another market access block that we can purchase from Maritime Link once they get their software issues completely fixed.

That's about another 10 per cent, so that's like 20 per cent from the Link itself. Then we're hoping to do perhaps present to government the idea of another call for proposals, but for sort of larger industrials. We call it Green Choice. There's the legislation that was passed last Spring that kind of enabled that opportunity, so that could be another 10 to 12 per cent. So we're getting closer.

Now, full disclosure: we need a firm backstop for that. That might mean that the 20 per cent has to be converted to natural gas. We would need batteries. We're also looking at how we can put some large-scale batteries on the system to provide firm capacity when the wind is not blowing. You need something to backstop that.

We're looking at all options. It doesn't mean that the Loop wouldn't still have other benefits, but it does. As I said in my opening remarks, it needs federal funding. But there might be the opportunity there for us when the offshore wind down the road takes off - is there a way for us to be able to supply wind energy to other jurisdictions as well?

BRAEDON CLARK: Obviously, as it relates to Bill No. 112, back in the Fall when that was introduced and passed in the Legislature, executives from Nova Scotia Power were pretty quick to say as a result of this: we can't move forward on significant projects, including the Atlantic Loop, and we're basically not going to be able to do much on the capital side and our bond rating is taking a hit and this will cost ratepayers more down the line.

I think we've seen that come to pass since that legislation was passed. Was that something that was anticipated at the time, or was that a bit of a surprise - that pretty quickly they said, look, we're out on the Loop. I think we can all agree that's a pretty critical piece of the goal of getting to 80 per cent. Was that foreseeable?

KAREN GATIEN: Just so I'm clear, you're asking if it was foreseeable that they would say they're pausing their infrastructure?

I wasn't aware of it until they said it, no. It was a surprise. I'm not surprised that they weren't happy and they had negative comments, of course. That wasn't a surprise. That particular decision, though, was not known to us until they said it.

BRAEDON CLARK: Sometimes I think we can try to do things in short-term cycles, and we don't think about the long-term consequences of this. I think this is one prime example of an issue where power rates will still go up and we're seeing some serious blowback and serious consequences of that. I'm not directing that commentary at you, necessarily. I just think it's the state of play, unfortunately

You've talked about green hydrogen. I don't think any of us in the Opposition or the government side would want to see anything fail that could be a great project, by any means. However, is that realistic or feasible to have significant scale of that type of project for green hydrogen online by 2030?

KAREN GATIEN: Yes, I believe it is. Particularly the two proponents that are moving forward right now are pretty ambitious, and they're moving as quickly as possible. Remember, for green hydrogen, a lot of that will be for export. Certainly, if there's a benefit to Nova Scotia, we'll take it, but a lot of the value of that is also the jobs and what the money does for the local economy as well.

Yes, certainly all indications at this point are that there would at least be some development ready by 2030.

BRAEDON CLARK: Just so I understand correctly, those projects, at least at this point, what's produced from them would likely be destined for export in a majority of a sense, to Europe for example?

KAREN GATIEN: I think it's too early to say for sure. I'm quite confident that if Nova Scotia Power wanted to purchase some, they could purchase some as well as they do any other fuel. Because it's such a quantity they're planning to produce, it wouldn't actually be possible for Nova Scotia probably to use all of the green hydrogen that they're estimating will be produced - and never mind the offshore wind down the road. Export is what makes it cost-effective to be produced here.

BRAEDON CLARK: I guess if I could summarize where we've gone on this, assuming 80 per cent renewables by 2030 with the Atlantic Loop seemed very feasible - I don't want to say likely because we're talking huge projects, but we had good reason to be very optimistic that we could achieve that. Without that, I would describe it as significantly more difficult.

How would you rate the probability of getting to 80 per cent without the Loop at all? Are we talking 50-50? Do you have any idea how you could quantify that?

KAREN GATIEN: I wouldn't have a percentage. I will say that we're working to get to 2030 for 80 per cent renewables. It might be more of a combination of things perhaps. Atlantic Loop might have been X percentage versus we might need two or three different types of renewable resources to make that same percentage up, but that's our target. That's what we're aiming for.

BRAEDON CLARK: The intention then I assume, and the goal and your expectation I assume as well, is that the remaining coal-fired plants in Nova Scotia will be closed by 2030. Is this the goal?

KAREN GATIEN: As it stands right now, yes.

THE CHAIR: The time has now elapsed for the Liberals. We'll move to the NDP for questioning. Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I do want to keep on this for a minute, but before I get back into the Atlantic Loop question, I just want to talk about green hydrogen for a minute. I want to know, deputy minister, what is your understanding of why in the legislation for the green hydrogen, there is no reference to green?

KAREN GATIEN: It's because there might be a transition, so there might be the opportunity for others. There's a whole range of colours: a blue hydrogen, a mix. There's that other 20 per cent. We might be able to mix hydrogen with natural gas to use it as well. If you just use the green hydrogen, it would just limit it.

[9:30 a.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, and it also opens the door to a huge investment in energy production that's not green. You can see why that's a concern and why we would have introduced amendments into the legislation because of that. This is exactly what we're talking about. We have these very ambitious and important goals to get to 80 per cent of renewables by 2030, and we don't see the government in the work that's happening, at least on the surface. We don't see a step-by-step plan to get there.

If there is an acknowledgement that some of that will be blue energy or a blue hydrogen before we get to the green, it would be great to see that laid out. This is the first time I have heard someone from the government say that out loud, so that's significant.

Getting back to the Atlantic Loop and the other questions around that, if that was happening, then that would be a significant step toward 80 per cent renewables. If it doesn't happen, then we've got these other options. That is very welcome to hear, obviously, but what I don't see and what was my criticism at the time of the climate plan being released is that we don't see a step-by-step, year-by-year analysis of how we're getting there.

We have this great goal of 2030. It's 2023 now. That means we have seven years. Is the department planning on releasing any kind of year-by-year, check this box, by the end of this, this has to be done, da-da-da, so that we can get to those targets? That's my first question - or, my second question, I guess.

KAREN GATIEN: At this point, no, but I'll certainly take that back and see if there's something within our accountability report where we could provide some form of updates on how that's moving forward.

Just to be clear, we're moving to green hydrogen. That's all that's going to sell in Europe, anyway. It's just that the term "hydrogen" keeps it broader as we move to the transition degree.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Echoing what my colleague from the Liberals was saying, the Atlantic Loop is the hope and dream, I guess. However, when we passed the legislation around the rate cap, Nova Scotia Power did threaten to divest in the Loop. How can Nova Scotians be sure that we're going to get the Atlantic Loop if we don't have the utility on board, or are we sure? If we're not sure, then are we just letting it go, or are we going to Plan B, or are we still pursuing Plan A?

KAREN GATIEN: We're looking at all options to get to that 80 per cent renewable energy, and we were with or without the Loop. We're looking at all options because we also have that 2050 net zero goal. We won't take our feet off the gas on that.

In terms of the Loop, we continue to have conversations. As recently as yesterday, I met with a couple of colleagues with the federal government to talk about it. At the last meeting, there's an Atlantic - I can never get titles right - round table kind of meeting with Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia on Loop discussions, and Nova Scotia Power was at the table as well. We continue to talk about it and see what's possible to move forward as they figure out what the state of play is for them as well.

There is no Loop without federal support. It's just too costly, and the price hasn't gone down. As you can appreciate with fuel costs rising and infrastructure and steel and wood - everything has gone up, so the price continues to escalate in terms of building it, and if we continue to have those conversations with the federal government, that will be a significant part, both for Nova Scotia Power and the feds.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I have a two-part question. There's no Atlantic Loop without the federal government, but is there an Atlantic Loop without Nova Scotia Power? That's my first question. The second question is: Is there a date by which you say, all right, we've got to scrap it, we've got to move to Plan B because now we're running out of time?

KAREN GATIEN: To be honest, I can't imagine a Loop without Nova Scotia Power. I don't know how that would work. It doesn't mean there wouldn't be some other way that I haven't thought of or can't think of at this point.

We don't have a set cut-off date at this point at all. We're hoping to continue to have the conversations, but I would probably say sooner rather than later there'll have to be decisions. The federal government is going to want to know if we're investing in this or not. As well, there are two other governments that will also have to decide, and two other utilities that will have to decide if they are also interested in continuing.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great, thank you. I'll go back to the climate plan and the climate risk assessment. It's really tricky to see right now whether we're on track to meet our energy targets. We know there are lots of good things happening. We know we're leaders in efficiency and all that stuff, although we have some work to do there too. We've seen the scramble year after year when we don't meet a particular target.

I just want to go back to the year-by-year plan. Will the government release a year-to-year plan that explains on the path to 80 per cent renewable energy and the phaseout of coal - what proportion of energy will come from what source each year? That would be the other part of that. Can you commit to that today?

KAREN GATIEN: I can commit to taking it back. I will take it back and propose it. I think you've said it before anyway - this doesn't seem new to me. I'm not being cute - I think you actually asked for that before, in the House maybe. We'll certainly look at how we can better communicate to the public where we're at. I take your point.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. I'll follow up in Estimates. That will be the next time we talk, probably. (Laughter)

One of the features of the framework with Nova Scotia Power is that they're guaranteed a profit from their operations. Other jurisdictions are implementing frameworks where returns are tied to performance, and we've definitely talked about this in this House, known as performance-based regulation. Are there discussions at the department about requiring that type of regulation for Nova Scotia Power? Is the government exploring this?

We've talked about it a lot. When all of this stuff has been going down with Nova Scotia Power, this has been a suggestion. Just wanted to know if it's being heard at the department.

KAREN GATIEN: Absolutely. In fact, there was a performance standard just passed. I'm trying to think. It was for large industrials mostly, and there's also one that will direct the NSUARB to use smart meters to assess if there are patterns of outages in certain areas, certain residential customers, certain commercial customers, and direct NSP to make course corrections and the possibility of penalties.

We're looking at what other performance standards might be needed as well. You may remember in the Spring of 2022, we set the stage for the performance standards and moving forward. We continue to have those discussions on what would be appropriate and what that might look like and how that might work.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaking of penalties, in 2019, Nova Scotia Power failed to meet its legislated targets, and therefore the company was levied a financial penalty of around \$165 million, I think. Of course, that would be passed on to the ratepayers, so that penalty was forgiven. That's great news for the ratepayers, but expensive for the government, and also doesn't hold the company to account.

If we're looking at a performance-based regulation, I don't know that penalties are the way to go. We need to be able to affect the company so that it actually matters that they're not doing what they are legislated to do. That would be tied to their portion of profits as opposed to levying a fine, but then, we'll forget about that fine because it's too expensive for everybody.

My question is about that particular case of the \$165 million. Were there terms to the agreement, and if there were terms to the agreement of the forgiveness of that penalty, what were those terms? Is there a way to ensure that when Nova Scotia Power doesn't meet targets or performance standards that there is a real consequence?

KAREN GATIEN: I actually don't know that situation. I wasn't with the department then, but happy to get someone to prepare you a response. I can certainly take

that back. The \$165 million, I've heard of it the same as everyone else, but I wasn't - the 2019 penalty?

SUSAN LEBLANC: My understanding is that the penalty was from 2019, but the \$165 million was forgiven in 2022, so you were with the department then, right?

KAREN GATIEN: I don't have the details of the circumstances, but yes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to go back to efficiency for a second. Everyone knows that the cheapest, most effective type of energy is efficiency. This is not in debate. So the great program that was announced about the heat pumps is really important for a lot of Nova Scotians. I talk about heat pumps all the time, as you probably know.

For that program, what percentage of that program is being funded by the federal government and what percentage is by the provincial government?

KAREN GATIEN: Right now, we're still in negotiations with the federal government. They've indicated a pot of about \$60.5 million, and we've put in over - I think it's four years - and our portion is \$140 million at this point. For the low income, it would be free heat pumps, and then for middle income, it's to continue with the subsidy, and also efficiency work for both.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Madam Chair, may I ask that we get a statement with all of that written down? That would be great for the committee to have at some point.

I have another question I wanted to ask when it comes to efficiency. As we go toward 2030 and we're building new buildings and we're talking about residential buildings - we know we have a massive amount of residential development happening, but we also have other types of buildings being built.

Is the department considering actually requiring any new builds from here on in to be built so that we don't have any more furnaces and that we only have heat pumps or other types of renewable energy for heating sources - like, adopting building codes that actually require us to stop using fossil fuels?

KAREN GATIEN: As part of our work with the climate plan - we partnered quite a bit with Environment and Climate change on that plan - we're looking at banning the installations of oil-fired equipment in new buildings by 2025 and adopting the National Energy Code for Buildings 2020 and the National Building Code of Canada 2020. We're looking at supporting construction of net-zero buildings and multi-residential buildings, including net-zero affordable housing, which will be really important.

We're requiring that any and all new government buildings have major retrofits and enter planning after 2020 to be net-zero-energy ready and climate resilient. There's also

the launching of that Green Choice program that I mentioned for the larger industrials or maybe larger residentials like universities to develop their own possible wind projects for renewable energy.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm hearing that there are right now residential projects happening - like single-family home projects - where they're putting in natural gas lines. If those houses are not built yet, why would they be built to bring in natural gas when we know that natural gas is not a renewable energy? You mentioned natural gas earlier - that maybe there's a chunk that has to be natural gas for a while. It's cleaner than oil, but not that much cleaner, and it's not renewable. It does produce greenhouse gas.

Can you square that circle? Should we not be making a significant change so that we are leading and we are just saying "no" to greenhouse gases?

KAREN GATIEN: At this time, the direction is oil-fired furnace, but certainly I would anticipate that as we get closer to that 2024 date, we would probably be looking at all other sources as well to see what the possibility of conversion is, too.

It's a good question that I'll take back. If you have natural gas fuelling your furnace, whether there's an opportunity down the road as we develop hydrogen and ammonia products, that it could be converted.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you. I was wanting to ask a question about parks. I'm thinking particularly about the situation with Mabou Provincial Park. Has there been from Cabot Cape Breton any overture or hint of an overture, or draft proposal, or anything along those lines to the department and the government about the proposal they are floating at the level of the community about a golf course at Cabot Links?

KAREN GATIEN: No overtures at all to me in the department, and I'm going to look to my colleagues. As of late yesterday, we had not received a proposal. We haven't received one today, as far as anyone knows, so no proposal at all. We check every day.

GARY BURRILL: Well, it's an odd situation people in Inverness County are in. The government has not been put in a position of having to exercise any responsibility in the absence of a proposal, and yet, the proposal is on the community's table, causing lots of concern and a considerable amount to division in the community.

In this situation where there is a de-facto proposal, but not a formal proposal - there's a community proposal, not a government proposal - would it not be helpful or fitting for the department or the government to offer some sense of the parameters in which such a proposal would be received by the department? Would that not help in the present turmoil that's taking place in Mabou?

[9:45 a.m.]

KAREN GATIEN: While I understand the question and the suggestion, it actually wouldn't be appropriate for us to - we haven't seen the proposal. It's not been presented to us. We would have to treat it as we would any other proposal to the department, and then make a decision. At this point, I actually don't know what they're asking for. I haven't seen it.

GARY BURRILL: As you know, there have been lots of community meetings about it. It's not as though nothing exists. Something has been put forward, just not through formal channels to the department. If anything at all were to come to the department about this kind of proposal, is the department and is the government committed to an open and transparent public consultation before a response or decision to that proposal is made?

KAREN GATIEN: If the proposal were to come in, it would go through the regular process. An application for access to Crown lands has to go through consultation - not just Mi'kmaw, but community consultation as well. If it went through the process, it would have all of that at that time. It would be treated like every other application for Crown lands.

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for NDP questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the PC caucus. You have until 10:09 a.m. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I want to get back to green hydrogen. It seems like a year ago, nobody was talking about green hydrogen. Now, it's in the news, it's everywhere. Can you expand a bit on Nova Scotia's potential for this sector? How will developing it help us meet our climate change goals?

KAREN GATIEN: I was at a session last Summer and I said, I've haven't talked about hydrogen as much since university chemistry. (Laughter)

In terms of meeting our climate goals, I think it's a real opportunity. It's produced by renewable energy. We have a great wind regime in Nova Scotia, onshore and offshore, so it will be a fairly straightforward over time way of producing energy to produce these electrons of green hydrogen, which can then be transitioned into ammonia, which is what will be easiest and in the safest way shipped overseas.

There's a real market for it around the world as every jurisdiction is trying to get off fossil fuels, including our own. We have high environmental standards in Nova Scotia. We have a really strong workforce, and I've already mentioned the wind regime and safety standards for our employees. We have people coming and knocking in areas that, let's face it, have had challenges in terms of economic development, so it's also an opportunity for rural communities.

It's not something that you are necessarily going to be able to produce in downtown Halifax, so it's a great opportunity that can be shared across the province. We will also hopefully be able to access it for our own fuel costs in Nova Scotia. I know that our proponents have also had discussions with Nova Scotia Power around opportunities, to make sure that they're aware of what's coming.

NOLAN YOUNG: Can you discuss different sources of renewable energy that your department may be working on? Are there multiple sources of different renewable energy you could expand that your work's under way on?

KAREN GATIEN: Sure. As I've mentioned, we had a wind procurement project. We really had great response to it. There are five proponents that will have to go through the fulsome environmental assessment process, community consultations and Mi'kmaq consultations. We're very optimistic that will provide the 12 per cent that I talked about - over 350 megawatts of power. I think it's now up to about 370. As we progress through that, we continue to work on tidal. In many ways, it's much more complex, but we're continuing to work through that.

Also, our solar community is thriving. That is a great news story in terms of jobs across the province as well. It's about 2,500 jobs, and it continues to grow. It represents about 8 per cent of the renewables. As I mentioned when I answered one of the first questions, it's going to take every possible option. We continue to have discussions on the possibilities for offshore wind, which is quite exciting.

Just as a reminder, for those who aren't aware, there's a joint management structure with the federal government for the offshore, similar to what it would have been for natural gas. We're working with them and working to launch a regional assessment with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, and that will really be a broad consultation around the opportunities for offshore wind.

NOLAN YOUNG: Ms. Gatien, when you had your opening remarks, you talked a about a critical mineral strategy. Are you able to expand a little bit on that?

KAREN GATIEN: As I mentioned earlier, the federal government made an announcement of their strategy, as have other provinces, which was mentioned. With this list of critical minerals that the federal government have identified, we're looking to see if we agree and what the opportunities are in Nova Scotia for some critical minerals.

Just to give you a concrete example, a lot of the green technology will require critical minerals, as do phones, computers and other things. There are jurisdictions in the world like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which perhaps has different environmental and safety standards for its employees. But we use it, and we have to use it for green tech.

How do we know that it's environmentally safe and that the employees are safe? Then how do we help support the economy of Nova Scotia by being able to access the benefits of that supply chain that will result? We're looking at what the opportunities are in Nova Scotia for critical minerals. What do they include? How do we educate the public around it? Once we land on, these are the critical minerals and this is the type of mining that we would support for them, then how do we start to socialize that with people so they understand what it is and what it isn't?

NOLAN YOUNG: Advancing energy efficiency was also part of your department's mandate. I'm just wondering, what actions are we taking through energy efficiency, both to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and lower energy costs for families and businesses?

KAREN GATIEN: This is a long-standing program, and we continue to grow it and support it. I think at this point we've done energy efficiency programming in about 1,200 First Nations homes. In the end, all of the homes in the 13 communities will have efficiency assessments done and work done.

We recently announced the funding for - I'm not supposed to use off oil, but it's moving away from oil. It's not just a free heat pump for a low-income family - it's also the upgrades to their electrical panel. In a lot of cases, the existing electrical panel wouldn't be sufficient to be able to operate the pump, so at the same time it's providing some efficiency assessments around other changes and improvements. You can just putting the heat pump in and fix the electrical panel, but if you don't make sure that their windows and insulation are in a good place, the heat's still going to pour out, so we're doing all of that work.

We're also helping middle-income families because we know a lot of young families - yes, the income level may look good, but they have other expenses. Costs are going up everywhere, so we also increased the availability of subsidies and support for them, as well, to continue the efficiency work.

NOLAN YOUNG: I want to get back to green hydrogen again. I'm wondering if you could tell us the process you use to address the multiple requests for Crown land for the green hydrogen development in a way that ensures Nova Scotia is well positioned to seize opportunities and become a global leader.

KAREN GATIEN: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there is not a lot of Crown land - 26 per cent of Nova Scotia is Crown land. We had four proponents who basically applied for pretty much the same area of land because that's where the wind regime is probably strongest, and they could get up to speed as quickly as possible. We wanted to support the industry and make sure that Nova Scotia was able to benefit from this significant opportunity but have as fair a process as possible and address some overlaps that existed in their applications as well.

They were the applicants for the area. There were other applicants nearby for different purposes, and we dealt with those in our normal way. We decided as a first process, we'd have what we're calling an RFA - a request for applications. They basically put in: here's what we're proposing, here's the land that we're requiring, and these are the things that we've done. Then we had a panel that were not involved in any way in the development of the work that we've done for green hydrogen.

There was someone with legal expertise, economics and energy expertise, and land management science experience - a PhD - who went through the process and the applications. Based on what they presented, they basically were able to see who was able to really move quickly - your first move or advantage - and really had done the work that they needed to do, even at a preliminary stage with local community, to the community engagement side.

They've engaged the Mi'kmaq, they have some experience and background in doing this kind of work, and what culminated was a process where we will provide an M.O.U. to them. It's not a lease - it's an M.O.U. that basically says okay, we won't entertain applications for this two-year period while you go through your environmental assessment, your Mi'kmaw consultation, your testing, things like that.

It's no guarantee that at the end of the two years they're going to get a lease, if they haven't followed the processes and been approved. It's not a fast track that way, it was really a way to - as fairly as possible - support the growth of the industry and make sure that everyone had an opportunity to move forward.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'll pass it to my colleague, MLA Sheehy-Richard.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was so engaged in that, I didn't realize I was up next. I do want to pivot a little bit. When you talk about our goal of 20 per cent of our land and water being protected by 2030, can you talk a little bit more about some of the steps that you've taken already to get toward that goal?

KAREN GATIEN: The directive that we were given, which is in our mandate letter as well, was that we would address the parks and protected areas first - the PAPA plan from 2013. That's what we've been doing. I will say that we work hand-in-glove with our colleagues at the Department of Environment and Climate Change. It's a shared goal for us to do that.

By 2023, we also have to complete a plan. We have the 2013, which will get us to approximately 14 per cent, I think - then what's the plan going forward to get to 20 per cent by 2030? Certainly, we have project team conversations happening, but we haven't produced the plan for the 20 per cent yet, but it is due in 2023.

[10:00 a.m.]

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Also, something else that popped up in your opening remarks, when you talked about the department being responsible for also our provincial parks system. Can you talk about the success and some of the things that you saw from this past 2022 season, and how that went?

KAREN GATIEN: I will say that I'm really proud of the work that all of the staff at the parks have done. The growth has continued year over year. As a camper myself, I think it's just tremendous that so many Nova Scotians are taking advantage of these beautiful parks.

I won't say any more. I will actually let Peter, who is the executive director who leads that area, speak to that.

PETER GEDDES: We continue to have very successful parks seasons. It's exceeded, I think, our expectations even. We thought maybe there was an anomaly for a year or two with COVID, but in fact, this past year - not that COVID's gone - we've still seen the bar going up.

This year for our camping parks - we have 20 camping parks in the province - we had 99,000 camper nights. Those are camp sites that are booked. If not for Hurricane Fiona, we would have broken 100,000. That's about double what it would have been back in 2011, so major increase in use of our camping parks.

We also know incidentally that our day use parks and hiking trails are becoming much more used. We use tools called trail counters where we can count the number of people who come through. We count cars. Our lifeguards make observations about the number of people at our beaches as well too. It's been a great news story for provincial parks. They've been highly used, and the curve is going up in the interest, so it's great.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: That's excellent to hear. I enjoy our provincial parks immensely. I like to hike when I have time. I don't find that as often as I do now, but I do plan to go to Uniacke this weekend.

Also in that work, can you talk a little bit - I remember in another committee I think I was in - about the accessibility and the inclusion improvements that you're making to some of the parks?

PETER GEDDES: That's a piece that we're certainly proud of. We've invested quite a bit of time and resources in the last couple of years. This started three seasons ago, I think. We hired some students to do accessibility audits around our parks and generate some recommendations and ideas for improvements. Since that time, we've made a number of investments in things like Mobi-mats - you might have heard of them. These are beach

mats that go out so that people who are in wheelchairs can access beach parks. We've made a number of those investments.

We've also made changes to our access in parks as well too - making parks more accessible. We've looked at signage. We have also made some pretty significant infrastructure investments in gender-neutral washrooms, but also accessible washrooms. Really amazing design that's been done there. We're planning more of that this year as well too. For example, we plan this year to put in a new comfort station at Dollar Lake Provincial Park and also replace the building at Lawrencetown Beach Provincial Park as well too. I see Mr. Smith smiling at that one. I think that's good news there. (Laughter)

All those new building designs are designed to an accessibility standard and for gender neutrality. The other thing is that the new accessibility strategy actually includes - we were proud to see one our parks on the cover, showing a Mobi-mat in use, which was nice. It actually includes some specifics about making more camp sites accessible as well. We have some camp sites that have been made accessible now, but we're going to be creating more camp sites that are accessible as well.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Very good. Within the budget is a very big allocation. There are so many parks, and some of them are aging parks. In particular, I was wondering if any of those investments would be going toward also repairing aging play equipment that some of them once upon a time had - each Summer you go back, and there's less and less equipment. Because that's also a piece of the inclusion, are there any plans for some of that to make them family friendly? It would attract, for example, more families to use that particular park.

PETER GEDDES: Well, it's good news that we're getting a lot more visitors to parks. As you'd imagine, it puts demand on the system and demand on the infrastructure. I mean, there's lot of aging infrastructure around the province. There are issues with playground equipment as one example, but we've got other types of infrastructure in our parks that are important to maintain. Of course, some of it just gets old and needs to be replaced. But we also have storm events like we saw this year that can just wipe out a boardwalk or a set of stairs at the beach, or can cover trails and trees that require a lot of time.

We maintain a rolling list of park priorities for infrastructure - a five-year rolling plan of things that we want to move forward with. We do have a TCA allocation every year for \$1 million for capital-type projects. That would include the new building at Lawrencetown Beach, as an example. At any given time, we can say what we want to do next year or the year after.

We are always having to respond to some of these unexpected events like Hurricane Fiona, which did do some damage in parks as well, too. We do have some budget to manage that. But clearly long-term, as demand and use continue to rise, we'll have to continue to

look at ways to invest in parks. It's a good problem to have, but it's important to be able to maintain the resources and infrastructure in the parks as well.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I hope that we can look at that. I know with the Department of Public Works, there's a five-year capital plan that's shared. Is there such a place that one could go look at what is anticipated or shared?

PETER GEDDES: Well, it so happens that the former director of parks is Matt Parker sitting over here. He would know a lot about the five-year capital plan. I can't remember if that's published or not. I'll turn it over to him.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Parker.

MATT PARKER: It's not published. Unfortunately, to Mr. Geddes' point, sometimes priorities need to change due to storm events or maybe a water system failing. As much as we have the plan, it is very much also a living document that will change year to year and even sometimes through the year because of different events.

THE CHAIR: Time has now elapsed for the PC questioning. We'll now move on to our second round. Each caucus will have nine minutes. We'll begin once again with the Liberal caucus. Mr. Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Nine minutes, correct?

THE CHAIR: Nine minutes -10:18 a.m.

BRAEDON CLARK: Perfect. I just wanted to go back to the issue of inventory of critical minerals, because I think there's actually an interesting historical example that gives us some direction on this.

Back in 2008, the Department of Energy commissioned what was called the Play Fairway Analysis - \$15 million. A good chunk of change, for sure, back in the day - 2008, I guess. The goal there was to stimulate offshore activity on oil and gas in particular.

My understanding is that the data that came out of that analysis was made open source, so anybody - Exxon, BP, whoever - could take a look at it, see what they think and come to us if they're interested. As a result, we have over \$2 billion of investment and activity of that \$15 million that the government invested.

Is that something that could be done on critical minerals, for example? Would that be a strategy that would make sense: hey look, here in Nova Scotia we spent a few million dollars on really getting down to the nitty-gritty of where everything is, and we're going to make that available to the global industry to attract people to come here? We know that

mines are among the most capital-intensive projects out there. If you get one up and running, you're going to obviously make your money back many times over.

Is that something that the department would consider? Again, we have a good recent example of that working very well here in the province.

KAREN GATIEN: Certainly, if there was a need for that information. I think that "play fair" idea has come up for a couple of things. We're looking at anything that would help further that if it gets approved. There's quite an inventory already with our geologists in terms of what exists, as well as with the prospectors and the work that they've been doing, but if there was a need for further research and further study, we could certainly look at something like that.

BRAEDON CLARK: I think the marketing side of that and the open source side of that is the most interesting piece to me, so I think that's something we should be certainly thinking about.

I wanted to transition a little bit, too, to ask a couple of questions about forestry as well. As we know with the closure of Northern Pulp, that left a huge void in the market in terms of the low-grade wood in particular. I'm just wondering if you could give us a general sense of where the forestry industry is at in Nova Scotia at the moment, and if that gap, particularly on the low-grade side, is being filled at all. It's a big question, I know.

KAREN GATIEN: Maybe I'll kick it off and then punt it to Matt. I would say the forestry industry is strong. To be fair, the price of wood through COVID probably helped a bit, but we do know probably the No. 1 problem. It's pretty tied to labour force as well as a home for low-grade fibre, for sure. Similar to our efforts in renewable energy, we have several irons in the fire trying to figure out what different options are there, in terms of developing biofuel and new markets for our low-grade fibre. We continue that work.

That piece is still troublesome. We're hoping there are some good opportunities ahead, but it's been a bit of an effort. The high price of lumber, I think, has sort of carried them a little bit. It hasn't hit them as hard as it's probably going to in the next few years, so we're trying to get ahead of that as much as possible and make sure that it doesn't.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Parker, did you have a comment?

MATT PARKER: I was just going to say I think that we're always looking for opportunities, and we're always trying to work with the sector to determine what the best use is for any of our fibre, including our low-grade.

BRAEDON CLARK: I think the deputy minister's point is spot-on. You don't want to be in a situation where a high price - it's a commodity, and it goes up and down - is masking some fundamental weaknesses or gaps in the marketplace.

Believe it or not, actually, even though I represent quite a dense suburban riding, I do have a sawmill owner in my riding who I was speaking with the other day - an amazing guy. That was the issue in particular of, what do I do with the low-grade that's still - especially if you're starting out as a small operator, it's very difficult. I appreciate the response there.

Kind of connected to this, we talk about the green economy, the green jobs of the future. Of course, we all want to see that but also, any time there's a transition of that scale, people will be hurt. People will lose jobs, things close, industries change dramatically. That kind of just transition, to use that phrase - how does the department consider that? How do you plan for that in forestry, for example, or think about people who are working in coal plants in Nova Scotia right now who probably justifiably have a lot of anxiety about what their future's going to look like?

I was out today walking the dog this morning. The guy who's filling the oil tank at the neighbour's house - all of those positions are tenuous in some way. How does the department see that? What is the department doing, if anything, to kind of prepare these industries for what could be - and we hope will be, to be honest - a pretty seismic transition over the next decade-plus?

KAREN GATIEN: I think the coal plant example is a good one. I would say that we believe the forestry industry is going to be healthy and strong. There might be some worker transition within it, of course. There are mills where, as they introduce technology, they're retraining their staff. Literally the job was to turn the log, now to train them to the next job up, which is a great opportunity for people to increase their skills.

That doesn't mean we won't pay attention to it, but the just transition with the coal plants is probably the most timely example, I think. In terms of our role, it would be more in the community piece of it. We work as part of a team with our colleagues at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, because they would have the lead in terms of the worker transition.

For example, if you take a coal plant in Cape Breton that's closing - because I think that's a question that actually came up - we would work with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration and Nova Scotia Power - because it's their employees. Our piece of it would be what we can do in terms of helping the community get ready. We are meeting and talking about what the opportunities are, as LSI would work towards what the opportunities are to retrain these employees for new opportunities in the green sector, in the renewables sector, and helping them to understand what jobs are coming, that are available.

We have a little group of deputy ministers who meet fairly regularly in terms of the green hydrogen file: Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Environment and Climate Change, and the

Office of L'nu Affairs. We've included and invited our colleague from the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration because it's important that you don't wait for it to hit us.

[10:15 a.m.]

My background is in workforce development actually. A lot of times they would come to us, as you would know, and say, we need employees trained in this area of work. If you come when you need them, it's almost too late - not that you shouldn't. However, if we can see it coming ahead - we know renewable energy is coming, we know green hydrogen is coming, we know these new jobs are developing. How do we engage the Department of Advanced Education and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to get ready for that so that the just transition is smoother as well? Really great question, I appreciate the question.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for the Liberal questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the NDP, and you have until 10:27 a.m. Mr. Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: I wonder if we could think a little bit more about West Mabou Beach Provincial Park. It's not an abstraction for people in Inverness County to be concerned about what might go ahead in the absence of their having been effectively consulted. This whole scenario was so much in the public in recent years around Owls Head, and the legislation that we had proposed, which would have made it impossible to proceed without the kind of consultation that Owls Head didn't have. That legislation hasn't been successful.

I think it is reasonable for people to ask, what could happen here? We have all this ferment in the community. The government says, not ours, we do not have anything, we're out of the picture until we have something.

In that situation, I think it would be helpful if you could say as unequivocally as possible that there will be no decision taken on a proposal to convert West Mabou Beach Provincial Park under Cabot Cape Breton to a golf course without effective, complete, open, transparent consultation with the people of the communities affected. Is that a commitment that you'd be in a position to make today?

KAREN GATIEN: Absolutely, consultation has to happen. I think what might be helpful, maybe if Leslie could talk about what the process is when the application comes in, and Peter's process. Both of their teams work pretty closely together when we get applications for Crown land use. It might assure you a little bit.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hickman.

LESLIE HICKMAN: Any proposal to use Crown lands requires an application. That way it's a formal, open, transparent process and we can track that document through

the system. As soon as that's received, it triggers a series of different types of reviews, due diligence, and obligations and research we have to take.

The first thing that would trigger would be what we call our Crown lands research. In this case, it's pretty clear that we own the land, but in other applications, it's not always clear. We research to see and confirm we own it, and then to identify any current uses or encumbrances that may impact the other new request.

Simultaneously with that, we order what's called an integrated resource management report, and that is Mr. Geddes' team. That's a group of experts within the department who review things such as biodiversity, geology, access different types of forestry use, and that sort of thing. In this case, because it's a provincial park which comes under the Provincial Parks Act versus just the Crown Lands Act, that would trigger some reviews through Peter's team to look at those types of obligations and mitigations, which may be required, and so on.

Then a critical part of any application received is doing consultation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. It's an obligation we take very seriously. Any time there's potential to impact existing or potential rights, that's triggered. That would be a key part early on in the process as well.

Those are things that have to happen for any type of application. When we're talking about our park, as I mentioned, it would involve working closely with Mr. Geddes' team because that's the group that has the expertise over the Provincial Parks Act.

Getting into the more technical legal part - clearly, these types of requests will result in various legal types of documentations. If we got through the research, we got through the reviews, and it was something that was going to be contemplated, we would then get into an agreement. We would set out all the terms and requirements of the different types of obligations the proponent or applicant is going to have to meet.

In the case of something like this, it would include RNR appraisal, survey work. That's where we can build in the level of public consultation, because the Mi'kmaq consultation is just a given, and we always express that in our agreements. That's something that we always have to follow. Then ultimately, that sort of request would always end up with Cabinet approval, ministerial approval, and so on.

As far as the consultation question, it's not atypical that we would have a spectrum and different levels of types of consultation. Without seeing the proposal, I can't commit to what that would exactly involve. I don't know if Mr. Geddes wants to add anything from the IRM perspective to that type of review.

PETER GEDDES: I don't think I have anything to add on that process. I think that covered it fairly well.

KAREN GATIEN: Yes, Peter's actually just reminded me that the Premier's been on record saying there would be a consultation on this one if they send their proposal in.

GARY BURRILL: I also want to ask about biomass. You were saying in your opening remarks about the sustainable harvest of residuals directed toward biomass. But I don't think there would be very many contractors in the province who would say that over the last decade everything that they had shipped to biomass fell in that category. This is a major, legitimate concern.

In the original recommendations about renewable status in biomass and so on, it always came down to the lifecycle analysis. That in order for biomass-generated electricity to be regarded as renewable - this is an empirical question, the answer to which is to be supplied by a lifecycle analysis, but the department has never brought forward that kind of analysis. Does the department have plans to bring forward a lifecycle analysis about biomass-generated electricity? If there aren't plans, would it not be a good idea?

MATT PARKER: We agree that biomass needs to be sustainably harvested, and that when we harvest wood, we need to take the best use out first. That is sawables, and then anything left over after the sawable harvest, whether it's a sawmill residual or a residual in the forest should again go to best use. Biomass is not always the best use, as we know, but it is a good use when there are no other uses. We are actively working on making sure that biomass is sustainably procured.

In terms of the lifecycle analysis, I'll have to take that back to my team and see what work we've done on that - if we've done any work or not on that.

GARY BURRILL: I do think it is a very important consideration, because of course the public in general doesn't have the expertise to answer this empirical question: Is this renewable or not? But experts say the answer to that question has to do with a lifecycle analysis. I would think that it would then fall to the department's responsibility both to have the answer to the question of what the result of the lifecycle analysis is, and to make the methodology public.

If that were a commitment that the department could make, that they will investigate having a lifecycle analysis that's been recommended all through these years and that it will be made public. I think that would be very important.

KAREN GATIEN: We'll certainly take it back and find out what's been done and why or why not. We'll certainly commit to that. Absolutely.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: We'll now go to the PC caucus. Mr. Taggart, with nine minutes.

TOM TAGGART: My first question is kind of out there. We talked a little bit about mine-site remediation and the costs. Deputy Minister Gatien spoke about tailings and re-mining tailings. Is there any potential for any of these what we might call contaminated sites to combine the work to renew the tailings and still take - is there any potential there at all?

PETER GEDDES: Certainly there's a lot of work going on around the whole mine-site remediation piece involving multiple departments. We've got a cross-departmental committee that works on these issues. One of the advantages of having the Geoscience and Mines Branch with our Land Services Branch in the department is that we've been able to kind of team up on some of these types of solutions.

So yes, we've been talking about some of those options. It will really come down to sort of the right site, the right timing, the right economics and all those kinds of things, but we are doing some work now to consider what a pilot site might be. At this point in time, we do not have a site in mind.

TOM TAGGART: It just almost seems too good to be true that you could clean this up and get good out of it.

Promoting forest sector innovation and transformation is listed in the 2022-23 business plan as a key initiative. Can you discuss any specific progress that we've made on that initiative?

MATT PARKER: We work with a variety of stakeholders on that. We've worked with the folks at the Nova Scotia Innovation Hub to look at ways to use low-grade fibre. The Forestry Innovation Transition Trust has provided funding to do an economic task force to look at ways to make the sector more viable and sustainable in the long-term. Again, being a commodity-based industry, to make it go through the ups and downs and, again, add more value to the economics of Nova Scotia.

TOM TAGGART: What can you tell us about recovery plans for species at risk? What's the status of this, and what partners might you be working with?

MATT PARKER: We're actively working on that. Folks remember we had a judicial review a few years ago. We've implemented all six requirements under that judicial review, and we continue to work on our species-at-risk files.

We still have some outstanding, but those ones are more difficult or more challenging ones where we have a lack of scientific information to help us. An example of that would be an insect where the last recorded occurrence was 20 years ago. To get the scientific information to be able to help us develop that plan is a little bit challenging, but also we work very closely with our federal colleagues, with the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and developing recovery plans for them.

[10:30 a.m.]

TOM TAGGART: Last October, it was announced that your department would invest \$4.6 million to help private woodlot owners clean up trees that were blown down, leaning, or weakened during Hurricane Fiona. I'm wondering if we could have a little bit of a progress report on that, please.

MATT PARKER: We partnered with the Association for Sustainable Forestry to help us deliver that program. To date, we've had over 300 landowners who have self-identified with the association who have identified with blown-down damage.

Right now, they've actually paid out seven claims to landowners, and we have over 60 parcels of private land under way in that program. We're able to get that money out the door quickly and get some cleanup happening on private land.

THE CHAIR: Over to Mr. Smith. You have just over four minutes.

KENT SMITH: I'm not sure if I'll fill all the four minutes or not. I've got one that I want to address quickly just because my colleague, the member for Halifax Chebucto, brought it up. That is Owls Head - clearly on the Eastern Shore - which had a lot of attention throughout the campaign period. I just want to make it clear and get some comments from the department on the situation with Owls Head. It's nothing like the situation with West Mabou - I wonder if you could comment on that, deputy minister.

KAREN GATIEN: I think I agree. It wasn't actually even a designated park - Owls Head either. It was proposed. This is a park in Mabou. I don't know if you want to add anything - either of you guys.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Geddes.

PETER GEDDES: There's a lot of history there to lay out. I think one distinction - as the deputy minister said, the scenario is that Owls Head was on a list of sites for potential future protections of parks. It had never formally received that designation. It wasn't a Parks and Protected Areas plan park. Mabou is a working park. It's an established park that is designated and operational.

I think the other distinction is that Owls Head was basically undeveloped land. There had never been any development activity occur there before. Whereas in this case with West Mabou, there are actually park assets and park resources located there.

KENT SMITH: Thank you very much. I appreciate that clarity. You referenced the Parks and Protected Areas plan. That's the 2013 plan that came out. I believe there are 782 areas identified on that. I'm wondering if you can speak to what the plan is for those 782 potentially protected parks and areas as we move forward.

PETER GEDDES: I'm not sure that's the exact right number. Within the plan, there are three different types of sites that we talk about. One is wilderness areas, and one is nature reserves. Those two are under the mandate of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. In fact, once they're designated, they're no longer Crown land. If they became Crown land, they wouldn't be administered by that department. Then we've got the park sites.

On the park site side, the ones that fall to us - we've got about 89 parks that are left in that plan that have yet to be designated. There are quite a few wilderness areas and nature reserves that also do have to be done throughout the plan. We will continue to work on that.

I think our minister has been pretty clear that job one is to try to get that Parks and Protected Areas plan wrapped up, which gets us to around 14 per cent. Even before that's done, this year we have to start putting together a plan on how we go from that 14 per cent on to the 20 per cent commitment. Big challenge.

Only 25 per cent of the province is Crown land. It's going to be a big challenge to work through. This year we'll be working on that plan to get to 20 per cent by focusing on what types of land we want to look for, what criteria, what types of landscapes we want to have representing those protected areas.

At the end of the year, we should have some type of strategy on how we're going to choose the sites to get us to the next phase of 20 per cent by 2030.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith, you have 40 seconds left.

KENT SMITH: Perfect. I guess I'll just wrap up by saying, thanks everyone for being here today. I always like it when Department of Natural Resources and Renewables is a witness, and we can talk a little bit. It gives me the opportunity to highlight all the wonderful natural resources that we have on the Eastern Shore - the five great beaches that are on the top 10 in the province, the parks and the trails that we have.

Thank you. Hopefully we get some more infrastructure dollars to increase the parking and increase the tourism that it brings to the Eastern Shore. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Gatién, do you have any closing remarks?

KAREN GATIÉN: Just a sincere thank you for your interest in the topic. We're very proud of the work the department does. In many cases, we're the frontline, client facing - you know, we're in the regions and the rural communities and working with our fellow Nova Scotians and doing some really great and important work. We appreciate your interest and questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Our witnesses are free to go out into the world. We will continue on with committee business right now.

Our first item of committee business is a motion that came to the floor in a previous meeting. MLA Maguire has requested that it be delayed until he is actually here to deal with it. Mr. MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I was going to say, out of respect for the member, we should defer it until he's here. I'm glad he asked for that.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We'll move on to pre-hearing briefings. This item is carried forward from the December 14<sup>th</sup> meeting because a decision wasn't reached on how the committee would like to proceed in relation to preparation for the new topics it has selected.

To prepare the committee for meetings is part of the new procedure related to topic selection. Some folks expected hearing briefings to discuss key areas of focus would be held with the Auditor General's Office the week before witnesses appear on a topic. Others were surprised by that.

What this means, in essence, is that a meeting date would be taken up by an in-camera pre-hearing briefing - I think we should discuss that. This is the way that we deal with Auditor General's Reports. We have a meeting the week before. It is in camera. It has not been how we dealt with topics in the past, so I wanted to put that out to the committee for some discussion about how it needs to be done. We had some very brief discussion last time.

Mr. Young, I think you're indicating that you'd like to speak.

NOLAN YOUNG: I think we have one foot in the pool and the other foot out. With the Auditor General, the way that we had intended to pilot the topic selection, I think input from the Auditor General would be critical when we're talking about accountability reports. I'd like to see this in the same manner as other Auditor General reports where we have her in camera and we can talk collaboratively prior to the actual meeting. I'd like to see us do the in camera briefing prior to the topic.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just will say that in the past - and I don't remember how far in the past, but certainly I was on the committee - there was a time when there would be a briefing in advance of the meeting. What I'm suggesting, or putting on the table, at least, is that, say we had a meeting next week for - say today's meeting. The week before

whatever meeting was scheduled, at 8:30 a.m., we would have an in camera briefing about the topic that's coming up the following week.

That gives us a chance to get some information from the Auditor General, and our researchers would be there. Then we can sort of go back and prepare for the meeting that's the week before. That would immediately precede a meeting on a different topic, but I think we can probably get our heads around that, changing track.

I just want to put that on the table. I don't remember what it was for, but we used to have half-hour in camera meetings with the Auditor General in advance of a regular 9:00 meeting.

THE CHAIR: I was not a member of the committee, let me be clear, but my recollection is it would be a half-hour meeting on the topic that we were going into.

That was the past practice, and as I did indicate in the last - when we dealt with it very quickly last time, there is nothing that prevents us from doing a virtual meeting beforehand in camera, rather than taking up another meeting in camera, not in public.

Mr. Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: Obviously, I'm not a permanent member of the committee, so I will say this with respect. I agree with what MLA Leblanc had to say. There's obviously a limited number of days and a limited number of topics to have PAC meetings. I think it's a very important committee for all members.

I think what the member has proposed makes sense. To lose an entire meeting seems excessive to me, so I think a middle-ground solution would be to have, again, whether it's 15 minutes, half an hour, 45 minutes, I don't know, something like that prior to a regularly-scheduled meeting so that we're not losing a significant number of potential meeting days. There are limited opportunities to hear from these folks, and I think we should have as many of them as we can for all members.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That being said, I lost my train of thought, but one of the things I was going to say is that I think an online meeting would be great. I can see the people from outside the city centre would be like, getting here at 8:30 a.m. is tricky. An online meeting at a different time would prevent that.

What I was going to mention is the difference between the accountability reports and the Auditor General's Reports. For Auditor General's Reports, the Auditor General's Office has done a significant pile of work that they then want to come and explain to us and take us through their extensive report. Whereas the accountability reports are done

yearly by the department, there's less meat and potatoes to them, so perhaps we don't need a full two hours with the Auditor General to go through them.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: This is a pilot. This is something that we're trying. This is not anything that's set in stone. I think the intent from the CAAF and the Auditor General was to really go through some of these reports. I don't think a half hour is necessarily going to cut it. I would like to see us do the in camera.

Perhaps the Auditor General would like to speak on what the intent was, but there's valuable information that certainly the AG could provide us with, and I don't see a half hour cutting it. It's not set in stone, this isn't something that we're going to do forever, but just during this trial period of working collaboratively, I really feel that we should be doing the in camera the week before the topic comes out.

I understand that there are only so many meeting dates and there are only so many times that we can actually get together, but really, are we meeting for the sake of meeting, or are we meeting for actual value and questioning and working together? Again, rather than a half-hour before, 15 minutes before, or whatnot, let's jump into this, let's take an approach to work collaboratively. It's only through this test period, this pilot period. It's not forever, and I think we should take that approach.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

KENT SMITH: I'll echo some of the comments from my colleague, but I'll begin by saying that as a newish member of this committee, only being here for a few months, I have found it extremely valuable to the entire process to get that extra time dedicated to learning about the topic prior to going into the regular meeting.

I'm a huge supporter of having the additional meeting to learn more about the topic, and to Mr. Clark's point that we only have a limited number of Wednesdays to meet and address topics, I think the value that we're getting out of the actual meeting as a result of having the meeting the week before is superior. It adds more value by having a little bit extra time to talk and learn about the topic at hand.

I'd love to keep it the way it is, and if it only turns out to be until the end of this pilot project, then so be it, but I see the value in it.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I didn't know we were in a pilot project, because we haven't had a motion to move the pilot project, but in the spirit of working collaboratively together, I would say sure, fine. We'll do it that way. I'm happy to support for the eight-month

period, but it is bitterly ironic that we're saying it will be for an eight-month period, and then we don't actually have a designated eight-month period.

[10:45 a.m.]

It's hard to support it when ultimately, right now, the PC caucus has the majority vote. We'll do what you need to do because you have the majority vote. But also, perhaps, if you're going to put a motion on the floor about this, it should designate an end time for trying this out because right now we have no way to know - right now you rule the roost. We know this. If we are working collaboratively, then we need to work collaboratively and we need to know that it's consensus, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, all the things we've talked about. You can't have it both ways. I mean, you can have it both ways because you're in charge, but it would be better if you didn't have it both ways.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Taggart, you wanted to say something?

TOM TAGGART: I just think that I want to go with the meeting a week in advance. I think that during this trial - I don't know we frame it now, but we're going to get the topics from the Auditor General, and I have to think that she'll select the topics that are of significant importance. I want to be fully briefed on them - I actually shouldn't say need, but I kind of like to ruminate on things a little bit. I like to have the knowledge in advance, and be able to think it through over a week, and ask a few questions, and stuff like that.

I like that, and I'd like to do that. I'm new-ish, like Mr. Smith is, but that's where I'd like to be, and then when we come back to normal or wherever we're going, then we do it. Those are my thoughts on it, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I will say that there is a middle way down the road, here, which is that we do have a meeting in advance so you can ruminate, but that it's online so you don't have to come in. That way, we get the information from the Auditor General, but we're not giving up a meeting. I'm just going to put that out there.

Again, we are, like, half-pregnant right now. (Laughter) Because we're in this pilot project that's never had a motion moved on it, and it's never been voted on, and yet we're dealing with it as if it's actually happened, and it has not. I will just put that out there.

SUSAN LEBLANC: There are 52 weeks in a year. Currently, we don't meet 52 times a year, so if we - there's six topics, I believe, from the Auditor General of these types of reports. Six plus six is 12, so if we have an extra six meetings instead of replacing other things with these meetings, I think that would be also a way to collaborate. So, we add six meetings to the schedule.

All of us have Wednesday from 9:00 to 11:00 blocked off in our calendars, so if we add six meetings to the schedule, that to me makes sense. If we're going to take away other

meetings for these, it makes less sense. We have room in the schedule. We don't meet every single Wednesday, so I would say let's adjust the schedule to make that work.

I think in the spirit of collaboration, in the spirit of getting briefed and having all the information we need as a committee to ask the right questions, I think it's all important, but it means that we meet more instead of - we meet differently. I hope that you - you look confused by what I'm saying.

NOLAN YOUNG: I am confused on what you're saying here. (Laughter) Can you explain that again?

SUSAN LEBLANC: My concern is that by taking six meetings and making them briefings with the Auditor General, that we lose other meeting times. We lose time to do the ones that we proposed or whatever. Remember, there's also those meetings on the docket, things like topics that we were all interested in.

I understand that the Auditor General's proposing things based on our conversations with her. What I'm saying is that we don't switch out an existing spot for one of these meetings, a briefing meeting, but we add meetings.

If we have an Auditor General's Report - for instance, today's topic. We could have met last week for two hours with the Auditor General in preparation for today's topic. That makes sense as it was an empty spot, but if it wasn't an empty spot - say we put that meeting there and then we bump everything up.

I know that the clerk has already scheduled some meetings, so that might be tricky in some cases, but going forward, all I am saying is that we don't replace existing meeting times, but we add six new slots into the schedule. That might mean we sit into June. That might mean we sit into July, God forbid, but we get those six meetings in. Or we meet every Wednesday every week until July or whatever it is.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the MLA answered the question I was going to ask. What you're saying is you want us to meet over Christmas and Summer - because those are the only times we actually don't meet. We don't meet for March Break. Unless I missed the schedule - and the clerk can correct me - the only times that they do not schedule us are the Christmas break, March Break, and Summer. I will obviously defer to the Chair to get clarification for that.

THE CHAIR: Sometimes we have dates where we don't have witnesses who are available, so there are open meetings. There are not a lot of them. I can say that. (Interruption) Sorry. Mr. MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: If that's what you're talking about, that also does not just affect us. We had this conversation before. The provincial staff schedule their vacations when committees don't meet. For me, if you're talking about going from not meeting in Summer to meeting all through the Summer, that conversation is going to take longer than this meeting, is my opinion.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: There are 52 weeks in the year. I don't see how the math works out. If we add six meetings to what we're already doing, it will not take the full two months of Summer break, if you consider Summer break to be July and August. It will not take the full, say, three weeks of the holiday season, because that is - eight plus three is 12, and there are only six meetings.

Also, people are free to miss a meeting. We have a substitute today. We often have substitutes. It's possible. I am saying it is not fair to take away - to use this briefing period to limit topics that we want to bring forward to this committee. It's nice to have some wiggle room.

I don't think this is a rocket science decision. We all agree that it's good to have briefings from the Auditor General. We all agree it's good to be prepared. We all agree that it's good that we are on the same page when it comes to asking questions. That's the point. That's the whole point of working better.

All I'm saying is let us work hard to slot those meetings in, understanding that people like to have a Summer vacation and understanding that people need to take a break every once in a while or have another commitment, that we would get this done.

Six meetings - we can do it. Come on, kids.

THE CHAIR: I will just say that's why I actually think the virtual option is better. It's clear that we have people who don't want to meet during the Summer and at Christmastime, and I respect that. That's why taking a meeting time on the day before or the week before with the AG virtually is an option that sort of makes everybody happy. If we're continuing to be half-pregnant, we at least have an option here. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: We meet 40 times a year. We meet more than any other Public Accounts Committee in the country and perhaps beyond. I think in the spirit of the Auditor General and the CAAF, the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, and those meetings that we had, I'd like to put a motion on the floor.

I move that the Public Accounts Committee hold in camera briefings the week before at the usual scheduled committee time for the purposes of discussing topics put forward by the Auditor General.

Just to clarify, this is just for the current topic selection that we have with accountability reports to go through it.

THE CHAIR: All right. We have a motion on the floor.

Mr. Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'd just ask for a recorded vote on this motion.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion on this?

The clerk will conduct a recorded vote.

[The clerk calls the roll.]

[10:55 a.m.]

**YEAS**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard  
John A. MacDonald  
Tom Taggart  
Nolan Young  
Kent Smith

**NAYS**

Susan Leblanc  
Gary Burrill  
Braedon Clark  
Hon. Kelly Regan

THE CLERK: For, 5. Against, 4.

THE CHAIR: The motion is carried.

We will move on to the endorsement of Auditor General recommendations from the 2022 financial report. The committee's practice is to endorse the recommendations made by the Auditor General that have been accepted by departments.

Ms. Leblanc moved the standard motion to endorse the recommendation, which was left on the floor because we ran out of time. The motion was that the Public Accounts Committee formally accept and endorse recommendations contained in the 2022 financial report of the Auditor General that have been accepted by the audited departments or agencies and ask that those departments and agencies commit to and take responsibility for full and timely implementation of the recommendations accepted by those departments and agencies.

I open the floor for discussion. Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I would love to hear the motion, because I was the one - what's that?

THE CHAIR: I just read it.

TOM TAGGART: Sorry. I spoke out about this in the last meeting. I misunderstood it, because I didn't realize that it said that only those that were accepted by the departments. I think I'm satisfied with that. I apologize.

THE CHAIR: I will just say that the response from the department was not a typical one, because usually they say, we're accepting all of these except for maybe this one, and they say why. The response from the department was a bit of a straddle. They said they would do it if they were told to by the government, so it was a little different. It's a bit of a wrinkle. I don't even know what we do with that. To me it's half a no. It's half pregnant again.

I'm open to hearing other points. Mr. MacDonald, we have a minute and a half.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I will be very quick, Madam Chair. That is why I would have preferred, as I said to this - just having that emailed out five minutes before for us to look at it - we possibly could have had this dealt with last month. It's different if I move we change something to green, but when you've got a long one, it would be nice to have it. That's why it's one of my pet peeves, as you know as the Chair. I'll stop talking so we can vote on it.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Recorded vote.

THE CHAIR: There's been a request for a recorded vote.

[The clerk calls the roll.]

[10:58 a.m.]

**YEAS**

**NAYS**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard  
John A. MacDonald  
Tom Taggart  
Nolan Young  
Susan Leblanc  
Gary Burrill  
Braedon Clark

Kent Smith  
Hon. Kelly Regan

THE CLERK: For, 9. Against, 0.

THE CHAIR: The motion is carried.

We do have correspondence, which we probably can't deal with in this - it would be pretty brief, but we have 10 seconds. I will just say, those motions were contained in what was sent out, so they were previously received by people, as was the correspondence. That did come out, so we do all have copies of that. Now we're at 11:00 a.m., so we'll deal with the correspondence next week.

Our next meeting day is January 18, 2023 in camera with the Office of the Auditor General regarding Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority's examination of the service contract awards.

The time having elapsed, the meeting is adjourned.

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