



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Resources and Environment

Department of Environment
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, May 5, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-6

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Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

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Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL), Deputy Chair

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McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC)
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)

Also in Attendance

Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)

Department of Environment Participant

Hon. Rob Renner Minister

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[Ms Blakeman in the chair]

**Department of Environment
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Deputy Chair: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. This evening the committee has under consideration the estimates for the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010. What I'm going to ask is that we go around and have the members introduce themselves. We'll skip over the minister and his staff, and we will come back to you and let you introduce your staff before you start your 10-minute segment.

I'm Laurie Blakeman. I would like to welcome each and every one of you to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Notley: Rachel Notley, MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mrs. McQueen: Good evening. Diana McQueen, Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Berger: Evan Berger, Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Drysdale: Wayne Drysdale, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Webber: Len Webber, Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Griffiths: Doug Griffiths, Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Oberle: Good evening. Frank Oberle, Peace River.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you all very much.

Unfortunately, the person who is designated as the chairperson of this committee, Mr. Prins, who would normally chair the meeting, is unable to do so. Although I am the deputy chair and would normally take over those duties, as I did yesterday, I'm also the Official Opposition critic for this department, and the second Liberal member on this committee is the deputy chair of the committee that is meeting in the other boardroom at the same time. This is the second time that this particular conundrum has come up for us this budget debate.

In order to facilitate and move on, according to Standing Order 54(3) I would now request that one of the members of the committee serve as the acting chair for this meeting. The member must be a member of the committee, and we would need a motion from the floor to nominate that individual. I'm asking for a nomination. I see that Mr. Berger has his hand up.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to nominate Mr. Frank Oberle, from Peace River.

The Deputy Chair: I take it that that's to serve as acting chair for the evening's estimates.

Mr. Berger: I'd like to change it from Madam Chairman to Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Oh, you just gave me such a good opening, and I'm going to take pity on you and not take it.

We have a motion on the floor appointing Mr. Oberle as the acting chair for this evening's meeting of the Committee on Resources and Environment. All those in favour? Opposed? That would be carried. Thanks very much, folks.

[Mr. Oberle in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Well, thank you, I think. Just before we get going, I'm going to ask the minister to introduce his staff, please.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to introduce my staff this evening. I'm actually looking forward, I think, to this evening. I've got some terrific people that are supporting what we do in Alberta Environment. To my immediate right is Deputy Minister Jim Ellis. Beside him is Mike Dalrymple, our executive director for finance. On my left is Al Sanderson, assistant deputy minister, strategic support and integration division. Al is the one that will be helping me with issues related to the business plan and such matters. Also in attendance tonight: Bev Yee, assistant deputy minister, environmental stewardship; Ernie Hui, assistant deputy minister, environmental assurance; Rob Penny, assistant deputy minister, environmental management; Kim Capstick, who is our director of communications; and Jeff Kasbrick, who is with my office.

Thank you, all, for coming.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Just before we proceed, I'd like to take a minute to briefly review the new process for consideration of the estimates. First, I'd like to remind members that the vote on the estimates and any amendments moved during committee consideration of the estimates will be deferred until we are in Committee of Supply, scheduled for May 7. Also, members wishing to propose amendments are reminded to consult with Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. on the day the amendment is to be moved.

If during the course of our meeting the minister agrees to provide a written response to certain questions, we'd ask that the response be tabled in the Assembly by the minister or through the Clerk. Note that tablings through the Clerk must be received in room 315 of the Legislature Building by 11 a.m. on the day of tabling.

Ms Blakeman is looking at me. That apparently has been requested by Parliamentary Counsel.

The standing orders of the Assembly governing who can speak apply during the consideration of the main estimates. Members of the committee, the minister, and other members present may be recognized to speak. Department officials and members' staff are permitted to be present during consideration of the estimates but are not allowed to speak. Members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time. A member and the minister may combine their speaking time for a total of 20 minutes. I would remind members to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their speaking time.

This evening we have three hours to consider the estimates of the Department of Environment. However, if prior to this time we should reach a point where members have exhausted their lists of questions, the department's estimates shall be deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run while these points are dealt with.

With the agreement of the committee we will take a short five-

minute break immediately following the questions put forward by the third party opposition.

With that, I'll invite the Minister of Environment to begin his remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really do appreciate the opportunity to discuss the current priorities within Alberta Environment. As you all know, the economic reality that we face is vastly different from where we were at this point last year. As a result, there have been some difficult decisions that needed to be made. I want to emphasize and I think we'll be able to demonstrate throughout the evening that we are not compromising our strategic vision or our department's role in protecting the environment.

The priorities for our department are outlined in the mandate letter from the Premier. If I can just refresh everyone's memory, our mandate is to lead the transition to a cumulative effects management system; to implement the climate change strategy, including regulatory conservation and adaptation initiatives; to implement the renewed water for life strategy to ensure the quality and quantity of water to support environmental, economic, and social needs for Albertans; and to work with Alberta Energy to ensure that energy resources are developed in an environmentally sustainable way.

Out of this mandate come, really, three clear priorities: cumulative effects management, climate change, and water for life. Throughout the evening I think that we'll be interwoven with those three priorities and will be pointing out how we will be able to deliver and how we plan to deliver those priorities. They clearly are the emphasis within our budget.

Alberta's energy must be developed as cleanly as possible by using best technologies available. Albertans expect this, and our customers expect this. We have high expectations to live up to, and we're confident that we can meet those expectations. The budget realizes opportunities that we have to balance environment, energy security, and the role of the economy. Alberta's success depends on addressing these areas together.

Our economy and our ability to meet global energy demands would not exist without Alberta's natural resources. We must live sustainable lives so that the vision for Alberta's future is realized. When we say that our economy would not exist without our natural resources, I think it goes without saying that our quality of life certainly would not exist if we didn't protect our environment and develop those natural resources in an appropriate way.

We have an economic situation that is a reality, but I must emphasize that we remain committed to environmental protection. There is some necessary belt-tightening in and outside of government as we speak: the private sector, municipal governments, and a number of organizations. I don't know that there's any organization within Alberta that has not been affected in one way or another by the economic reality. That reality is that we may not be able to do everything the way that we always have or even might want to do. What we've done with this budget was to prioritize and align our resources along the line of the three principles that I've already talked about, the priorities that we have.

6:40

We are making some difficult decisions, but we're not compromising key areas such as compliance and enforcement. Albertans can remain assured that the government will keep an eye on protecting Alberta's most valuable resource, the environment. This budget is a reduction in operating target of about \$12 million over last year. The reduction will affect contract and grant payments.

That's the unfortunate side of the current economic situation. I emphasize that it will maintain funding to keep the lights on and keep people working. The last thing that we want is to find ourselves in a position, when the economic conditions turn around, that we have pared back on our most valuable resource, our people, so that we then have to start to rebuild that corporate memory that is so valuable not only within the department but within a number of organizations that we fund, like the Water Council, for example, or the watershed advisory councils. A number of these key organizations that we depend upon have key employees that are working for them, and we want to ensure that our granting, while it may be reduced, will not compromise the ability for them to maintain that very, very key resource, and that's the people that they have.

Instead of focusing on what we no longer are doing, I will talk about some of the many things that we are doing. Priority 1 is cumulative effects. We've got \$102 million for environmental management approvals and compliance and enforcement activities that will reduce and manage cumulative effects on the environment. This is something new for us. We've put additional resources into this area so that we can develop this policy in a way that will actually prove to be successful.

The second priority is climate change. You'll find that \$172 million is allocated for climate change initiatives. That includes the climate change and emissions management fund, which is expected to grow by about \$95 million in 2009. We just recently announced \$15 million out of this fiscal year for the energy efficiency program. That announcement was actually over an extended period of time, so the commitment was for significantly more than that. Fifty-two million dollars are reflected in this budget for the Canada ecotrust for clean air and climate change. This is a grant that flows through from the federal government. It's about \$150 million, \$52 million dollars a year for the next three years.

Our third priority is water. We plan to manage Alberta's water resources to ensure quality and quantity. About \$16 million is allocated to support water for life, and a majority of the cross-ministry total of about \$22 million is in operating supports in this area. Our water for life initiative in 2009-10 is finalizing and implementing the provincial wetlands policy. We may want to have some discussion about that this evening in reviewing our water allocation and management system. That'll be a huge undertaking for us, that we've got under way and committed to this year.

Our capital plan is about \$100 million in capital support for regional drinking water and waste-water projects. That is not within the Alberta Environment budget, but we have a significant amount of input.

I think this is the right budget considering the economic reality facing government. It protects our core programs. It takes action on strategic priorities: cumulative effects, climate change, and water. I have to be frank; not everyone will be happy. We are making some tough decisions, but it shows that we're being fiscally responsible and protecting the environment.

Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to entertain questions.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm Frank, by the way.

For the next hour the Official Opposition and the minister have the floor. Ms Blakeman, will you be combining your time?

Ms Blakeman: I will be. Thank you very much for asking.

The Acting Chair: Okay. The two of you have the floor for the next hour.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for appearing and for bringing along so many of your wonderful staff. Nice to see everybody out tonight. I appreciate your support of the minister and how hard you work, even if I do hold your feet to the fire, she said sweetly.

We are dealing with the total budget. I'm sorry. Mr. Minister, this is a baseline debate for me, so you will find that in a lot of cases I'm asking for quite specific information, which, of course, probably won't be off the top of your head. I would be amazed if you had it off the top of your head. So the instructions we were given by the chairperson about tabling through the clerk of this committee or through the Clerk of the House: then it can be shared with all members of the committee.

Mr. Renner: That's fine. I'll certainly provide answers where it's appropriate. I do have some quite detailed notes here, and I will attempt to deal with them if I can.

Ms Blakeman: Perfect. Okay.

We're looking at a budget of \$347.6 million. Total voted expense is \$251.7 million, so assuming that I get the usual 80 minutes, I'm probably trying to debate about \$3.146 million a minute. So if I seem to talk fast, you can understand why.

The issues I'd like to cover tonight include stakeholder consultation; the land-use framework; cumulative effects management, which you talked about; issues around planning, wetlands, climate change, monitoring, compliance and enforcement, land securities, and water.

Let me start with goal 1 on page 119 of the Environment business plan: "The cumulative effects of development on land, air, water, and climate are managed to achieve Government of Alberta desired environmental outcomes." Now, what I noticed from this goal 1 is that there's no mention of the Cumulative Environmental Management Association, fondly known as CEMA, in the strategies that are related to achieve goal 1. In August of '08 Pembina, the Toxics Watch Society of Alberta, and the Fort McMurray Environmental Association all pulled out of CEMA, and four out of the five First Nation members had already withdrawn between '06 and '08. So we have an organization where decisions are made by consensus, but any of the members who would have been likely to have disagreed have pulled out, and the consensus now is between industry and government.

There has been an allocation of over \$4 million over the past two years, so the first question is: will there be enhanced participation from the department in CEMA, and if so, when? A supplementary to that is: what are the department's expectations on the \$1.3 million that is in CEMA's 2009 budget but is not covered by industry? Those are the first two questions.

Mr. Renner: Well, I think the issue around CEMA is an important one in that it is in keeping with the direction that we intend to head with respect to cumulative effects management. But CEMA is an organization that is restricted solely to oil sands. When we talk about cumulative effects management and putting a cumulative effects regime in place, it's much broader than just the oil sands. So when you say it's interesting that it's not mentioned in this document, this document refers to province-wide, and we see cumulative effects being implemented across the province. We're starting with pilot projects. One of the first is here in the Industrial Heartland. We see the lower Athabasca as the next area, but we don't intend to stop there. We'll continue to go, and we'll certainly be working with CEMA to provide us with some valuable input.

The role that CEMA plays is also one of providing us with some good baseline information, providing us with a general knowledge of the kind of activities that are going on in the oil sands so that we can incorporate that into policy development. But let's be very clear that it is Alberta Environment that will be responsible for developing the policy and putting that into place.

We've worked with CEMA to develop our wetlands policy, which we'll be dealing with shortly. We've worked with CEMA on issues related to water use and how we're going to be able to implement cumulative effects management on the Athabasca River. We've seen evidence of how that's going to work. So it's a valuable organization. But I think the role of CEMA has changed and will continue to change from where it was a while ago, when this was sort of an isolated situation that was concentrating almost exclusively on the north and on the lower Athabasca to the point where we're now looking at cumulative effects as being a significant part of our priority province-wide.

The other question that you had was with respect to the budget?

6:50

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Money.

Mr. Renner: There is an expectation that CEMA will continue to have input, financial and otherwise, from industry, and I don't know that there would be any change in that regard. There's no reason to believe that there will be a commitment of any less from industry's perspective. The funding that we have involved in CEMA would fall into that category that I talked about in my opening remarks, where we want to ensure that we maintain the ability to keep people in place, to keep the lights on, to keep the integrity of the system in place. But there may be some reductions that would involve, perhaps, some longer term research and projects and the like that could maybe be extended from, you know, one year to three years or three years to five years or something so that we can maximize the limited amount of dollars that are available.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I do understand that the cumulative effects is meant to be province-wide, but you have to admit that CEMA was the existing organization that was dealing with this, and its absence is notable, I think, in that it's not even mentioned as part of this.

The \$1.3 million that I was referring to is, in fact, the shortfall. It's what the industry is not covering out of their total budget, which is why I was wondering what the expectation of the government was toward that amount of money. It sounds like some of it will be coming but not, perhaps, as much as before.

Continuing on with CEMA, but it relates to the wider strategy around cumulative effects, the department has a legal responsibility to consult with the aboriginal community on environmental matters. I'm wondering: what is the department's current liability given the lack of aboriginal consultation at CEMA?

Mr. Renner: We've been very diligent in working with the First Nations, particularly in the lower Athabasca. We are attempting to establish a number of programs that would deal with consultation and working closely with Aboriginal Relations, who are also our partners in dealing with aboriginal consultation. For example, we're expecting to have an agreement in place very shortly. I talked with the minister of aboriginal affairs just today, actually, an update on where we are with respect to activities in that treaty area. We're hoping that we will have an agreement in place that will allow us to move forward from a perspective of consultation, that everyone agrees with what is the appropriate consultation.

On a smaller scale, for example, Minister Zwozdesky and I were in Fort Chip earlier this year, met with community leaders there. Among a number of things that we agreed to was that we would develop community-based monitoring systems to deal with a number of environmental monitorings, obviously water being a critical one to that community and to the interests of that community. I'm told that we're getting very close to having a final model in place that will be up and running very shortly. That would be part of the ongoing commitment that would be included in this budget: to have necessary funding in place to do that community-based monitoring in the Fort Chipewyan area.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm going to move on to the land-use framework and cumulative effects. The Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council has been announced before the aboriginal members are in place. That's according to a government press release from December 2008. That may have changed. I'm wondering what kind of a message the government believes is being sent when these really important advisory councils that are connected to the new Land Stewardship Act are actually in place and announced without aboriginal members on them.

Mr. Renner: You realize that the issues of land-use framework and the advisory councils fall under SRD, not Alberta Environment. That being said, we work together.

Ms Blakeman: Sure. But Environment and Energy and SRD all have a piece of this.

Mr. Renner: We all work together. In fact, we met as recently as about two weeks ago with the grand chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8. One of the things that we discussed – and there was a commitment from both sides – is that we are going to work very hard to have First Nations involvement on these advisory committees.

The issue is twofold. First of all, First Nations, rightfully so, do not see themselves as stakeholders. They don't see themselves as simply being part of an advisory committee. They believe very strongly, and we're committed to work with them, in government-to-government consultation. At the same time, we emphasized how important it was to have representation on these advisory committees so that aboriginal issues can be incorporated into the plan.

But at the end of the day there really needs to be a parallel track. There need to be two sets of work going on, so to speak. The advisory committee will be making recommendations to government. Hopefully, they will be having as much input as possible from representation on that advisory committee from First Nations. There's also a commitment from the Minister of SRD to meet on a one-to-one basis with the leadership in the First Nations as well. While LARC is very much in play and will be providing recommendations to cabinet for the regional plan, that plan is one that is done in concert with First Nations on a parallel track.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. How many environmental experts will be mandatory for these councils, and how will these experts be chosen?

Mr. Renner: We don't anticipate having the councils responsible for their own environmental experts. The base scientific information that they need to assist them in making their decisions will come from Alberta Environment. So it's up to the government to have those overarching kinds of input. What the regional advisory councils will do is take that information. We'll provide them with information with respect to in-stream flow needs, for example, on

the Athabasca River. There's no need to do everything twice. We'll let them know what the in-stream flow needs are, what is the best information that we have for industrial needs related to that, and then it's up to them to come back to us with a recommendation on how they see that flowing into the regional plan and how we're going to incorporate the cumulative effects of industrial development into that regional plan.

It will fall upon Alberta Environment or SRD, depending upon land use or any other functions, to provide the technical expertise. It will be up to the advisory council to determine what is the direction, what is the general direction that they see the overall plan leading. Let's not forget that at the end of the day what we have are advisory councils that provide their best advice to cabinet, but it is cabinet that makes the final decision on what those eventual plans are going to be. Then once those plans are put in place, they're binding on all parties. They would be binding on government, they would be binding on municipalities, and they would be binding on industry.

Ms Blakeman: What I'm hearing is that there will be no expectation or no designated spaces on these councils that will be recognized as experts in the environment.

7:00

Mr. Renner: No. They're supposed to be community-based councils. The technical advice that they will receive will be either from government or there may be occasions – we've got a significant amount of money allocated within this budget to support the implementation of these plans. There may actually need to be some consultants that are hired to provide technical advice depending upon the nature of the work that is under way and what kind of technical information is required. So we will either beef up internally within Environment, or we may provide funding to have the consulting done by LARC itself.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm looking at page 180 of the estimates, line 2.0.2. This is the amount for air and land policy under environmental assurance, and that amount of budgeted money has decreased by almost 25 per cent. I'm assuming that some of the funding for the land-use plans is coming out of that amount of money. The minister has said that he is contributing funds toward the development of the land-use plans. Can he give me some detail about what he is paying for and how much and which of these votes it's coming from?

Mr. Renner: It's difficult to get very, very specific on exactly what dollars are allocated where. If I can, I want to just explain how we dealt with the belt-tightening that was required as a result of the \$12 million that I talked about in my opening comments.

We went through our entire department, and we were conscious of the fact that our number one priority is to continue to maintain the personnel that we have. We determined what it's going to cost to maintain our staff complement, what it's going to cost to incorporate the contracts that have implications from an incremental wage perspective. That's a baseline. Then we went through, and we basically scooped up all of the program dollars from virtually every department and put that into a pool and then determined: where are our priorities? What are the areas that we absolutely need to do, like some commitments that we have on some baseline monitoring, like some instrumentation that we do that has to do with flood forecasting? There are literally dozens of programs throughout government that are from our perspective nondiscretionary. These are commitments that we need to have, so we funded all of those various programs.

Then we went through to our priorities. I talked about our priorities: cumulative effects, our water for life, and our climate change. We allocated a sum of dollars – it was about \$6 million in each case – to allow us to build on these priorities. It's going to take some additional dollars in a number of these areas for us to be able to move forward over the next year, so we allocated that. Then the balance of the dollars that are in place allows us to make the determinations on where we go with respect to grants and consulting fees.

For example, with a WPAC, a watershed advisory council, I've already advised them that their grants will be reduced this year, but they will only be reduced to the point that they're able to maintain their basic staff commitments, their basic level. They may not have the necessary funding or the same funding as they had last year to engage some consultants with respect to some – and it's important work. Let's not discount the important work as they put together their watershed plan, but we might have to extend that out for a year or two as opposed to getting it all done this year.

The important part of all of this is that we want to be sure that we don't lose the capacity that we need so that we've got people in place to continue to do the basic work, continue to keep these organizations viable, and to be there when we start to see the economic turnaround and all of a sudden we find that we're now ramping up and we need to have these folks in place in a much more strategic way.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. I appreciate that sort of general overview of your process. But a budget is a plan, so you guys know how you arrived at these figures and how you've allocated money for projects. I'm looking for some detail.

When we look at these land-use plans – and the cumulative effects study is supposed to inform these regional plans – we've got the South Saskatchewan region. The timeline to complete the regional plan is March of 2010, which is the same time that the cumulative effects study for the Bow River is also slated for completion. The baseline information you need to develop something is actually going to be scheduled to be completed at the same time. We've got three other water basins in the South Saskatchewan that haven't even had a state-of-the-basin report, and that would also be needed for a cumulative effects study. Can the minister go into a bit more detail about the timelines of how the minister is supposed to provide that baseline data for a cumulative effects study that's able to inform those regional plans? One is supposed to come before the other, and according to what I'm reading, they're slated to come at the same time. How is that possible?

Mr. Renner: I think the vision for the land-use framework is that it is a living document; it's not a static document. It will have basic parameters that are outlined. The community will decide where their priorities lie. As more information becomes available, that information can be incorporated into the plan itself. I don't know that we will ever be in a situation where we have got all of the basic scientific knowledge that we would like to have to go into these plans. If we wait until all of that knowledge is in place, the plans will never get done. The plans have to be flexible enough that they can adjust if new knowledge comes into place and they need to make adjustments.

Let me use an example. You talked about a river. If there is a determination made that we have to deal with quantity and quality in the South Saskatchewan River basin, it will be the land-use plan that will be responsible for determining: what are the relative uses of that water? How much of that water and how should it be

managed from the point of view of maintaining a healthy ecosystem? How much of that water needs to be in place to ensure that it recognizes First Nations demands and needs, for example? How much of that water needs to be in place to recognize the needs of municipalities and human development of one kind or another?

All of those will be determined within the plan, but the actual details on how that plan is implemented will change on an annual basis as the amount of water that's available ebbs and flows in a natural way, seasonally. It will change dependent upon our ability to invest in additional storage facilities, storage capacity, for example. If we are able to identify a need for additional on-stream or off-stream storage, that will have some impact on the actual implementation or delivery of water, but it won't have an impact on how we prioritize and how we determine that we ensure that that water is shared among all of the various users and all of the various needs that are outlined in that plan.

7:10

Ms Blakeman: This is a bit like trying to nail Jell-O. Clearly, for the government this is an important strategy to move forward on land use. I'm being told that it's equally important to have cumulative effects moving along with that, yet when I point out the knowledge base that you require to set benchmarks to understand where you're coming from, to be able to look back and judge your performance, or to measure whether we've been effective here, I'm trying to nail Jell-O again. So let me get specific. How many regions have defined thresholds? How many parameters are there for each region?

Mr. Renner: We're not anywhere near that point yet. That is the detail that will develop as we get using these plans. Let me use an analogy. Perhaps if, instead of talking about land use, we were talking about a highway network and saying that we need to have a general plan on where we're going to build roads in Alberta to accommodate growth, we'd have a general plan that would say: Okay; we need roads that are in these general areas. And we will have a plan that says that as traffic volumes increase, we'll do one of two things: we'll either figure out how to accommodate more vehicles, or we'll figure out how to keep some of those vehicles off the road. So as part of that plan we'll say that we want to put certain emphasis on public transit and keeping cars off the road and we want to put another emphasis on efficient highway systems.

But as technologies change, as cars perhaps get more efficient or get better at negotiating through the highway system, there needs to be some flexibility. At some point in time we might determine that all of this baseline information that we had was based on 2009 technology, and it's now 2015 or 2020. That technology is now irrelevant, and we have to move in another direction. All I'm saying is that you don't have to have all of the detailed analysis in place to begin to think about planning for a land base and planning from a cumulative effects perspective.

The main difference between cumulative effects management and the way that we do it today is that it is more focused on outcome than what we have right now. The way we regulate right now is on a project-by-project basis, and it's very much focused on input. So when someone comes along and wants to apply for some kind of an allocation or a licence, it's very focused on how much you take and how many emissions you are allowed to have, whether it be air or release into the river and all of those kinds of things. The difference under cumulative effects is that while we still focus on what the individuals are doing, we're more concerned with looking into the future and forecasting what is the outcome that we're trying to achieve, and what we need to do today in putting those various

approvals together to ensure that we're not going to exceed those kinds of limits when we get 15 or 20 years out.

None of the cumulative effects projects or the projects that would be approved under cumulative effects would be of the nature that we're going to be making decisions in the next year or two on whether they should proceed or not. We have room to increase our development, to increase our economic activity in the province, but we're recognizing that we will be reaching some limits at some point in time. We have to have the flexibility so that we can not only deal with approvals for new development, but we can also deal with the renewals of existing approvals so that we're confident that the existing development and the new development will allow us to achieve those outcomes that we've set as our long-term objectives. That's where we're going to be looking to the regional plans to establish those outcomes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I think you and I are going to have to agree to disagree on this one because I'm hearing that there's not a knowledge base; there's not a real drive to create that. There's a lot of talk about the future. I don't know how I'm going to measure that based on the fact that you're going to go into these plans without any kind of base knowledge on this.

Mr. Renner: Let me just point out . . .

Ms Blakeman: No. I'm sorry. I'm going to have to move on with other questions because I have so much to ask, and more than half our time is gone now.

Just to close off on cumulative effects, a couple of last questions. Who has the power to set the environmental thresholds that are going to be there? Will these thresholds be enforceable through legislation? Are you considering penalties if there's noncompliance? If you could just very briefly give me a response on that.

Mr. Renner: That's very simple. It is the Minister of Environment, the government, that has the authority to establish the thresholds. The whole plan is implemented through order in council, through cabinet, so it would be a recommendation from the Minister of Environment that would establish those thresholds. We would have the authority under legislation. Actually, we have the authority under existing legislation to deal with those thresholds. That's how we have announced that the cumulative effects regime is already in place for the Industrial Heartland.

Yes, there are penalties. The penalties are related to the actual operating authority. We will continue to have responsibility for project-by-project monitoring and the necessary compliance to deal with the authority that we grant them for emissions, and there will be penalties in the future, just as there are penalties today, if someone exceeds whatever allocation they have been given on their operating authority.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Five years from now, when we're having the same budget debate and I say to you, "You're claiming success," how would you know? There are no performance measurements in place, and you're not starting from a set base of knowledge. How are you going to be able to measure whether this has been successful, whether you have been able to keep some sort of control over cumulative effects?

Mr. Renner: Well, for example, I talked about the Industrial Heartland. We've already announced that we have a cap that's in place for SOx and NOx. We will know very precisely where we are

in relation to that cap on SOx and NOx. You will be able to ask me five years from now: "Where are you? Your cap is at 25,000. We've had industrial growth in that region. Where are you with respect to that cap, and how are you ensuring that these new developments that we keep hearing about are going to continue to stay within that cap?" That's how we will measure. It's very specific. We'll do the same thing with water, and we'll do the same thing with land and contaminants and sulphur management and the like. We're in the process right now of developing a sulphur management plan for that region, for example.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, speaking of water, then, last fall the minister said that you were in the process of consultations regarding allocation of water licences and for transfer of actual water licences, and you expected to have that complete sometime in the new year. This is early May, five months in. Are the consultations complete, and exactly who was consulted?

Mr. Renner: No, they are not complete. They're under way. The Water Council has been engaged in the process and will be providing us with recommendations. We've also got an advisory council that I appointed, headed up by David Percy from the University of Alberta, and he's brought a number of experts from around the province and in some cases outside of the province to provide us not only with recommendations but to provide us with some feedback on different ideas that are generated through the various processes. We have the Alberta water institute doing jurisdictional analysis. They're looking at the governance that's been used in various other jurisdictions throughout the world and providing us with some background information. Our intention is to bring all of the various sources of information together, put together a plan that we will then take out this fall and have a much broader consultation on.

7:20

I felt very strongly that I didn't want to just walk out and say, "Hey, we're thinking of changing the way we regulate water. Why don't you just tell us what's good, what's bad?" and have everybody running around wildly saying, "Well, the government might do this" and "The government might do that" and "It's a terrible thing" or, to the contrary, "The government may be doing some wonderful things." I felt it made more sense to put that straw dog out there and say: "Okay. This is what we're thinking of doing. We're not thinking of doing this. We're not thinking of doing this. This is it. Give us your feedback. Let us know what you think. Let us know what the pros and cons are on this." I think that creates a much more productive environment and constructive opportunity for people to have some true input.

This is an emotional issue. Mark Twain once said—and I couldn't agree more—that whisky is for drinking; water is for fighting over. That's what this is all about, and I'm trying to maintain the fighting to a minimum. I think the way we do that is by putting forward a concept in the fall that will clearly enunciate the areas that we think are viable and just as clearly enunciate the areas that we think are not viable and get a lot of concerns off the table right from the very start.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you. That's useful information because I think the problem with the FITFIR system is that it's essentially a water market, and the industry can sell their unused water rights to other groups such as municipalities, which has already led to some problems in the past. I'll put my concerns on the table. I think that industries that already have a vested interest in

their water rights, that are currently governing the water market and hold more sway, will convince the government to relax the current regulations. I'm hoping that the minister will be approaching this with a point of view that the individual's drinking needs come before industry's do. The question coming out of all of that is: when can Albertans expect a new surface water rights transfer system?

Mr. Renner: Well, I would hope that we would have things finalized and begin the actual implementation about a year from now. Whether or not we're able to bring it together that quickly I don't know. We will have the basic policy in place and conduct that discussion with Albertans by this fall. I guess it would depend upon how well or not that policy is received that will determine how quickly it can be advanced and implemented.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. On page 180 vote 3.0.3, water for life, is \$16 million. It's increased by less than \$200,000.

Mr. Renner: What was that number again?

Ms Blakeman: It's vote 3.0.3, water for life, under Environmental Stewardship on page 180. It's essentially your voted expense by element. A couple of questions on that. The renewal of water for life is listing 17 outcomes. I'm wondering if you can give us a breakdown of how the \$16 million relates to the 17 outcomes. I don't expect you to have it off the top of your head.

Mr. Renner: I can't relate that.

Ms Blakeman: But you could provide it.

Mr. Renner: Well, I don't know if I can. Clearly, there are things that we need to do under water for life. I can certainly tell you how we see the funds going. Of that \$16 million, about \$9 million is going to manpower of one kind or another, roughly 9 and a half million dollars is going to supplies and services – that reflects a one-time funding decrease for groundwater mapping that we've had in place for some time that would be reflected in here – and then about \$2 million is in grants. So that adds up to the total of \$16 million.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. On page 414 on water matters – sorry. Just let me double-check. I didn't cross-check a reference here, so I'm not sure which book it's in. On page 414 of the budget documents vote 3.0.6, municipal water/waste-water program and water for life, is \$188,300,000. I understand from the government press release that \$100,000 of this is going to be used to support water for life. Which programs are receiving funding from that \$100,000, and how does it break down?

Mr. Renner: That's the \$100 million that I was referring to in my opening comments? You're talking about capital, right? It's \$100 million in capital under water for life.

Ms Blakeman: It's not distinguishing it as capital, though, in what I'm looking at, but that's quite possible.

Mr. Renner: I suspect what you're looking at is Transportation's budget.

Ms Blakeman: That's correct.

Mr. Renner: It's not my budget.

Ms Blakeman: No, but it's water for life.

Mr. Renner: It's dollars that are allocated and delivered through Transportation but done in consultation with Environment, so we will establish what are the highest priorities, what are the areas that are in greatest need. The number one priority, from our perspective, is safe drinking water, so if we've got a need to make an investment in a water treatment facility that for whatever reason is in need of attention, that would have a high priority for us.

The next highest priority for us is on the development of regional water systems. There are a number of regional water systems. As you know, we've had legislation before the House to deal with some of these regional water systems that cross over interbasin lines, but there are a number of regional water systems throughout the province. Then we would also have some funding in there to deal with regional waste-water systems as well.

A hundred million dollars is a lot of money, but the reality is that these are very expensive projects. Most of them are in the vicinity of \$30 million to \$40 million and sometimes as much as \$60 million or \$80 million, so it's necessary for us to stage these over a longer period of time so that we can maximize as many projects as possible. But at the end of the day I won't deny that there are a lot of very viable, legitimate projects out there that have been waiting for a number of years for their funding to come through.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. What was the funding last year and then this year – I'm looking for the comparison figure – for the water advisory council and the WPACs?

Mr. Renner: It's \$1.3 million for the Water Council. I'm not sure that we've got the WPACs broken down. We'll have to get that information to you. Sorry. I do have it. Here we are. Mike came through. You want for last year?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm looking for the comparison last year to this year.

Mr. Renner: Well, we haven't made the final determination for this year. In total it was \$1.3 million for WPACs last year. As a result of the reductions that I referred to earlier, we are planning on \$800,000 for this year, so it's a reduction of about half a million. We'll be working individually with the various WPACs to determine exactly on a case-by-case basis what the funds are that will be necessary so that they can maintain that the door is open, that people make their payroll commitments and keep the lights on. We've made a point of not just being across the board; you know, everybody gets exactly the same cut. Everybody isn't necessarily created – some of these are at different stages in their development, so we'll deal with them on an individual basis. The bottom line is that we're going to have to reduce by about \$500,000. I've told them that they could face decreases of up to 50 per cent. Some of them may, most of them will not. That's about two-thirds of the budget.

7:30

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm going to come back to the actions if I get enough time.

I'm going to move on to wetlands, for which I think the only policy is 16 years old. In December the minister had said that a new wetland policy would be brought forward shortly. Well, I'm five foot three. I'm hoping that shortly would be about five foot three, and we'd know right away here. It is six months later. When can we expect to see a wetlands strategy?

Mr. Renner: Well, sooner rather than later suits me just fine, too. We've been through an internal process dealing with the wetlands. I'm advised by my deputy that it's scheduled for discussion with me on May 15. That's next week. That doesn't necessarily guarantee that that's when you'll see it because that's the point at which I'll provide my feedback and my comments. I'll then take that through our government-wide internal process for policy approval and development. I would hope that that would be done in a relatively short period of time, but these things, I've learned from experience, usually take anywhere from six weeks to two months, two and a half months. So that would mean that we probably will be in a position to make an announcement later on this summer.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'll be back to you on that one.

Mr. Renner: Jim reminds me that there's a priority that we get that done because the lower Athabasca regional plan has to have that information. So we're under the gun to actually get that out there because they will need that information to develop their regional plan.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm wondering about the interim policies that are in place to protect the wetlands that are in unsettled areas from being infilled and whether companies are required to pay into a fund for reclamation efforts.

Mr. Renner: Well, that's very much the essence of the policy that we're developing.

Ms Blakeman: I'm looking for something interim. Do you have anything interim?

Mr. Renner: No.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Mr. Renner: The interim policy only deals with white areas. That's why it was so important that we have a policy that can apply in the green areas as well.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Under which vote would I find wetland policy development and protection?

Mr. Renner: That would be under assurance. It's a policy development at this point. There aren't program funds, so it would be incorporated in our overall policy development. I don't know that you would be able to identify a specific line item. It's part of our policy development process. Like a lot of what we do, it's not necessarily program delivery, but it's capacity building. In some cases research and consultants' time goes into the development of these policies. It's also under water for life.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Wetlands interest me. We've already lost a lot of our sloughs and marshland in Alberta in the settled areas. I know that in settled areas the approved applicants are required to pay into a fund that's managed by Ducks Unlimited to pay for wetland restoration. That appears in your 2005 fact sheet. In Red Deer we'd already lost 63 per cent of the original wetland by 1990, and they're telling me that .5 per cent of the remaining wetland is lost every year. So we're losing it; it's eroding away from us.

Companies who destroy wetlands in developed areas – and you mentioned the white zone – have to pay a really teeny amount of

money for reclamation costs. For example, TransCanada recently paid \$3,700 to infill a wetland. So I'm wondering: given the unlikelihood of ever reclaiming these wetlands to their original state, is the \$3,700 that TransCanada paid for infilling a wetland sufficient?

Mr. Renner: Well, as you already pointed out, we don't have . . .

The Acting Chair: I'll just interject here. There are just over 9 minutes left in your time.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

Mr. Renner: Thanks. We already have a policy in place, but that policy doesn't deal with the green areas, and it doesn't deal with Crown land. It deals primarily with private. The new policy that we will be bringing forward will deal on a province-wide basis. I can't get into nor will I get into what that new policy is going to look like. As I said, I haven't even discussed it with my own colleagues yet. But it's fair to say that we're looking at a number of what I think are some far-reaching principles on how we deal with wetlands in the developing areas, the relatively undeveloped areas in the green areas, and also on how we can start to possibly see a re-establishment of wetlands in some of the areas like you've referred to where we've had dramatic loss. They're something called a constructed wetland, that we've never recognized before.

If you've got a huge amount of destruction of wetlands, it may not be possible to restore those wetlands because development has moved on. Look, you know, drive down a highway. There is a lot of land out there. There may be some areas that perhaps weren't historical wetlands but could be developed as a constructed wetland and that may be used as a vehicle to deal with the ongoing and new development. So there are a number of things that can go into these.

I do want to correct you on one thing. Ducks Unlimited is one of the primary deliverers of wetland construction and restoration, and they do handle the bulk of the dollars that come through the compensation that is required, but they don't have the sole authority. Any other organization that can prove to us that they're developing and are capable of developing wetlands would be eligible to receive that funding. It just happens that Ducks Unlimited have developed a tremendous amount of expertise and are very good at what they do. But there are a number of other organizations out there that are looking at options and opportunities for them to develop wetlands, outside of Ducks Unlimited, and we're more than happy to work with those folks as long as they can show us that they know what they're doing and they have the capacity to actually see these things through to completion.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. We're coming up to our last five minutes together, so I am going to move this amendment before I forget, which is essentially reducing vote 1.0.5, removing approximately half of the hosting expenses over \$600, and it says that

the estimates for people services under reference 1.0.5 at page 180 of the 2009-2010 main estimates of the Department of Environment be reduced by \$66,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 177 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$251,681,000.

I'm not going to go into debate on it, but I will have it distributed so that it's on the record because I'm sure our last five minutes will go very quickly.

I wanted to move to climate change strategy 1.4, appearing on page 120 of the ministry's business plan. It essentially says:

Continue to implement the Climate Change Strategy through policy, program and infrastructure initiatives and assure appropriate

governance of the Climate Change and Emissions Management Fund to support Alberta's intended outcome.

The ministry spent, really, a pretty teeny amount of the budget that it had allocated to climate change last year. I know that line 2.0.3 on page 180 shows that although \$62 million was allocated to climate change programs last year, the department forecast that it would only spend \$10 million. I'm wondering why the department so dramatically underspent its climate change budget and if you could outline what plans were sidelined or cut. Okay. I'll leave it at that.

7:40

Mr. Renner: There are two reasons for that. Part of that is the ecotrust funding. I talked about the \$52 million that's actually a flow-through from the federal government. We didn't get our application process in place soon enough to be able to deal with all of the various applications that came forward. There was an expectation that we would get it done in the previous fiscal year, but a couple of complications came up, one of which was that a number of the organizations that had put applications forward, because of the economic situation, had to withdraw their applications because they didn't feel that they were able to move forward to finance their contribution to those projects. So we're having to reassess our grants, but we should have those grants processed and out fairly quickly in this fiscal year. So that's part of it. That's \$52 million.

What we've essentially done is we've taken that \$150 million – it was to be \$50 million, \$50 million, \$50 million over three years – and we extended it out another year, so it's \$50 million, \$50 million, \$50 million in this three-year business plan. The money is still there. It's not lost. It'll still be spent.

The other is the way that we've got it structured for the emissions management fund, the technology fund, that we have on our CO₂ reduction. That is money that is collected from industry and flows back out to industry. We just announced that there was another \$82 million this year. That money flows out. It's a little bit confusing because the emissions management fund is done on a calendar year basis, so it's January to December, and our fiscal year is April to March. So there are some adjustments that need to be made and some estimates on what is the amount of funds that would accrue during that January, February, March period of time. It doesn't exactly fit with what we announced as being collected because we've not only collected the \$82 million up to December, but reflected in here is an estimate of how much we expect is going to be in that last three months of this fiscal year.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So the entire \$156 million from the Canadian . . .

The Acting Chair: There are two minutes remaining, Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: . . . ecotrust grant will be spent. What you've done is moved it from '09-10-11 to '10-11-12?

Mr. Renner: That's right.

Ms Blakeman: And it will all be spent on fighting climate change?

Mr. Renner: It's climate change and air quality, so some of it could go to air quality as well.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Mr. Renner: There's also the money that we talked about earlier that was allocated in last year's budget that didn't go forward for the

energy efficiency program, which is now in place. The same thing there: the funds that were in place have been carried forward, and they will flow through this year and next.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. One of the other things I've noticed is that California, for example, is the leader on climate change and climate change legislation. Its legislation is accompanied by a really, really intense implementation plan. A 946-page document goes along with it that outlines 18 different groups of emissions and cost-effectiveness and all of that and has definitive timelines and guidelines for laying out regulations and market mechanisms. We have a 32-page one, 12 pages of which are photos. As much as I like visual aids, the goals and strategies in here are much less specific than what we were getting out of the California one. Part of the problem that the Auditor General keeps identifying is that it's very hard for us to be able to tell and for the government to be able to tell how well it's doing in achieving these targets because it doesn't have . . . [Ms Blakeman's time expired]

The Acting Chair: That concludes the first portion of this meeting. Just before we proceed, I'm going to ask a member who came in a few minutes late to introduce himself.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. I'm Guy Boutilier from the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo constituency.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boutilier.

I'll also note that we've just been joined by a number of observers, participants in the Forum for Young Albertans. Welcome to all of you. We're considering the budget estimates of the Minister of Environment, and we'll now move to the third party opposition.

Ms Notley, will you be combining your time with the minister?

Ms Notley: Yes, I hope to do that.

The Acting Chair: Okay. The two of you have the floor for the next 20 minutes.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Yes, I would like to try to do the back-and-forth sort of thing that we've already been doing.

I'd like to start just a little bit by – you know, you made your introductory comments talking about the need to belt-tighten and the need to go back and look at priorities and that we all have to sort of accept the current economic reality. I suppose that in terms of looking at this budget at the starting point, I have to say that I don't agree with that view as far as it relates to this particular ministry. You're talking about protecting the environment not only for now, not for this fiscal year or the next fiscal year, but for years to come. Delaying initiatives or not following through on certain things as quickly as we would otherwise: to me, because this is a ministry that deals with accruing implications that are often irreversible, this is one of the places where we really shouldn't be looking at belt-tightening. But that's just my overall.

Now I'll go into questions and less grandstanding. Anyway, I want to just sort of start by going back to some of the core business that happens in your ministry under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Water Act in particular. I'd like to try to get a bit more clarification in terms of monitoring and compliance and enforcement and where we are with those line items and where we are in terms of the global allocation to those core business responsibilities under the act.

I'm just looking on pages 180 and 181. I've gone through the

votes, and from what I could tell – and I'm sure I don't have this completely accurate, so I'm really just looking for straight-up information here. I was looking at 2.0.1 and 4.0.3 and then, I'm assuming, both line items in vote 5 as being the primary sources from which the resources for compliance, enforcement, and monitoring are drawn. In that I include the whole process of licence and application review and then follow-up monitoring. Is that incorrect? Are there other sources? What I'd like to get is a global amount of money to that core business activity.

Mr. Renner: The monitoring comprises a number of different activities. Let's talk a little bit about what we are doing with respect to monitoring, and then we can maybe touch upon some of the areas where we see some room for us to exercise some restraint, so to speak. We have throughout the province airshed organizations that operate 12 air quality monitoring stations. These 12 stations provide air quality information and trends in Alberta's seven largest urban centres and metropolitan areas and also are important transboundary sites. Some of these sites have been in place since the 1970s. That is an area that we see as a priority, and we need to continue to ensure that that funding is in place.

Ms Notley: That work is not done directly through Environment but through these other organizations?

Mr. Renner: That's right.

Ms Notley: So how much money do those organizations receive at this point?

Mr. Renner: Mike will track that down for you, and I'll get it to you.

Ms Notley: Sure.

Mr. Renner: We also have ongoing ground monitoring programs. There are 215 wells throughout the province. We typically monitor around 50 a year. We've drilled 215 wells, and then we go around and deal with 50. In that area we're going to reduce from approximately 50 to approximately 30. We continue to have that base knowledge, but it will extend out a little bit.

You need to understand that these ground monitoring wells are not designed to provide us with immediate information. They're designed to provide us with long-term trends. When we have all of these wells, we just move around and we test and have test results, and we'll measure what they produce and what the levels are and what the quality of the water is. You don't need to do all of them every year or every month. You need to be able to have enough to see that there are trends, and then you plot those on a graph. That's an area where we need to continue to do work.

7:50

Ms Notley: Can I ask: of those 215 wells what percentage of the groundwater are you able to assess generally? What kind of coverage are you getting when you look at all of them, globally?

Mr. Renner: Well, they're placed geographically throughout the province. I don't think I could honestly say a hundred per cent, but they tend to be in the areas where we're most dependent upon groundwater. We also have a number of these in areas where we're trying to determine what the connection is between groundwater and surface water. So when you look at these long-term trends, you can

look at whether there's a correlation between the results in these groundwater wells and the reality that we're facing on surface water. It's not so much that they're there to monitor the actual quality of the water. They're there so that we can have a better understanding of what the correlation is between groundwater and surface water.

Ms Notley: I understand that with these wells, then, you're doing more of a trending. You're observing the trending in terms of the development or the course, shall we say, of the groundwater status. We're talking about a cut, then, I guess, of about 40 per cent. Do you have an actual dollar number associated with that?

Mr. Renner: I don't, but I do have the dollar number for the airsheds now.

Ms Notley: Okay.

Mr. Renner: It's \$718,000, and there's been no change this year compared to last year. It is one of the priority areas for us, so we'll maintain that funding at exactly the same level.

Ms Notley: Okay. In terms of the groundwater monitoring can you get me a global amount?

Mr. Renner: If we don't have it later on here, I'll get it to you.

Ms Notley: So that's sort of trending.

Now, I assume that there are certain circumstances where you are doing two types of more hands-on inspection: one which is in response to either industry or public complaint or concerns being raised and one which, I presume, periodically is on a proactive basis. Where do I find the cost from last year versus this year for those functions?

Mr. Renner: It's included in the compliance and enforcement section of the budget.

Ms Notley: So that would be in 4.0.3.

Mr. Renner: In 4.0.3, and you can see that there's no change there.

Ms Notley: Right. So it's included in there.

Could I get from you a breakdown between the number of inspections which are in response to industry or public complaint versus a non externally initiated inspection? Just sort of: "You know what? We're going to go check this out. Nobody has called us. Nothing has been spilled. No one is smelling anything. We're just checking it out, and we're showing up in person to do it." A breakdown on frequency in terms of those two functions.

Mr. Renner: We'll have to get that to you.

Ms Notley: I absolutely can't expect that you would have that right away. I'm just looking at whether I could get that information from you. I do believe it's available. We just haven't quite asked that question yet.

Mr. Renner: I'm sure we can get that for you. I think it's important to note that while you do have to have a balance and you have to have both, we depend very heavily on the public becoming engaged and informing us when there is something that they believe needs to be drawn to our attention. We simply will not ever – we could

quadruple our budget, and we would still only have people on the ground, you know, less than 1 per cent of the time throughout the province. So there is a strong component of working with the public, and frankly, contrary to popular belief, there is a need for self-reporting. We rely very heavily on that, and the reason that we have confidence in that self-reporting is that we consider it to be as much of an offence to not report an incident as it is for the incident to have happened in the first place. So that is important.

Oftentimes these exceedances are something that we have actually built into the system. When we give someone an operating authority, we say: this is the expectation that we have from your operation; you can have so much SO₂, for example, out of your stack. When you have some kind of an incident on a site and all of a sudden there's an exceedance, that doesn't necessarily pose a risk to the public because it's a short time. It's something that happens. They'll get involved in flaring, or they'll do a number of things. When they report to us, they say: "This is what happened. This is what we did to correct the problem, and this is what action we've taken to prevent that from happening again." We build that in to ensure that – the expectation is that, you know, things break; it won't be perfect all the time. But we need to know whether there is an ongoing pattern that's developing. Then we say: "No, no, no, no. You have an authority for this level of emissions. Your exceedances have gotten out of hand, and you're going to have to do something."

Ms Notley: That's great. I'd still like that breakdown. Without getting into a big debate about it, because I'm just trying to get information, I don't think that your sort of voluntary compliance or self-reporting system can work if there isn't a certain amount of external verification around that or external checks and balances. That's what I'm looking for, that information.

Mr. Renner: The dollar figure for groundwater monitoring is \$100,000, which has been reduced by about 50 per cent. We will be focusing on the lower Athabasca. Again, that's a priority area for us.

Ms Notley: Okay. Now, just on water monitoring as well, there were some reports in the media not too, too long ago about potential cuts to other organizations that engage in water testing. I'm thinking about the Lake Management Society, that's doing testing. I believe there was talk that there might be a cut of two-thirds in the type of work that they do. Is that the case? Are there other similar societies that will be experiencing cuts?

Mr. Renner: When I was talking to Ms Blakeman earlier, I talked about how we're dealing with the WPACs, and I said that we'll be reducing the grants to WPACs.

Ms Notley: I'm not talking about the WPACs.

Mr. Renner: I know, but I'm just saying that we'll be doing the same thing with some of the other monitoring groups, the lake monitoring and some of the other groups that we have. It's premature at this point to say that any particular organization is going to be faced with a cut. We know how much money we need to take out of that general area.

Ms Notley: Could you just remind me where that general area is? It's basically the WPACs and some of these organizations that do water monitoring. Which line item is that that would have to see a cut? Obviously, you've budgeted for a cut, and now you're trying to figure out where to cut from. So which line item was that?

Mr. Renner: It's in the water for life.

Ms Notley: That's in the water for life. Okay. Gotcha.
If I could then just sort of move on . . .

Mr. Renner: Let me just point out, though, that that's why it's difficult, when you're looking at the 50,000-foot level at a budget, to drill down into some of the detail.

Ms Notley: I'd be happy for you to give another 25,000 feet of budget information to us.

Mr. Renner: You look at water for life. We've actually reallocated money from some other areas into water for life because it's a priority area, but within water for life there is also some reallocation to allow us to move forward. Our priority this year in water for life is on getting the water allocation system up and running, and we've devoted a significant amount of resources to that. We'll put time and energy from our own department, and frankly we're going to have to go out and hire some consultants to provide us with some scientific data so that we can actually put this thing into play.

8:00

Ms Notley: That's for the purpose of getting the water protection plans for each watershed in place?

The Acting Chair: There are five minutes remaining.

Mr. Renner: It's twofold. It's water protection, but it's also water allocation. Particularly, we've got extreme pressure in the south right now because we're fully allocated, so if we're going to have economic growth in southern Alberta, we're going to have to do two things.

Ms Notley: Sorry. I'm truly not trying to interrupt. It's just that I only have five minutes, and I want to move on to one more topic, and I know where you're going with that. I think I do. Not to be disrespectful, but I just have so little time to ask questions.

I'd like to go quickly, then, to item 5, which is the oil sands environmental management. Correct me if I'm wrong, but is that the area through which you fund the application and licensing for development in what you refer to as the oil sands?

Mr. Renner: Actually, no. Most of that is devoted to policy development so when we talk about the work that's ongoing with respect to our work on the Athabasca River and the in-stream flow needs. We've got some work that's ongoing on development of policy for things like bitumen extraction that's in contact with water. There is ongoing work in conjunction with the ERCB on tailings ponds management and tailings ponds technology. There is always a huge amount of work that needs to be done to support the actual process that you refer to. When we deal with and process applications and approvals, we can only do that if we've got that basic knowledge and science that's there to back them up. So a lot of what they do is develop the basic science and knowledge and keep up with technology. Technology in this area, as you can well imagine, is changing on almost a daily basis.

Ms Notley: Where's the licensing review and application work happening? What is that under?

Mr. Renner: That's under approvals, 4.0.2, under Environmental Management.

Ms Notley: Okay. Under 4.0.2. For those, can you give me a general breakdown of how much of that work is being done by Environment ministry staff versus consultants?

Mr. Renner: It changes depending upon the volume that we're dealing with, but I would say that it's 50 per cent for the EIAs, for the environmental impact assessments, and we do all of the approvals internally ourselves.

Ms Notley: With the EIAs and the consultants are there criteria with respect to whether those consultants also work in industry?

Mr. Renner: Well, those consultants always work in industry. That's how they make their money. They wouldn't be direct employees of the applicant.

Ms Notley: No, but their business in other contexts would come from the applicants.

Mr. Renner: Yes. They're engineers. But remember that an EIA is not a decision-making body.

The Acting Chair: One minute remaining.

Ms Notley: But it plays an advisory kind of role, right?

Mr. Renner: Well, no, not really. The role that Alberta Environment plays in an EIA is a co-ordinating role, to identify what issues need to be addressed by the applicant, to hear from various affected parties on what concerns they have and to put a complete package together that then goes to the approval authority. It might be the NRCB, or it might be the ERCB. They're the ones that take that environmental impact assessment and then make the decision that basically then comes back to us in Environment saying: "Okay. We authorize you to approve the development of this project subject to the following conditions that have been identified in the EIA." So it ends up back on our desk at the end at the approval stage, and we do all of those internally.

Ms Notley: Right. Okay. But the EIA is where you find some of the subjects and the conditions and all that kind of stuff.

Mr. Renner: I'm advised that there is a conflict-of-interest clause in determining who the consultant is that prepares the report as well.

Ms Notley: Can I get a copy of that sent to me along with all the various bits of information that I'm asking for? That would be great.

The Acting Chair: That concludes this portion of the meeting.

Before we move on, I'm going to call a quick five-minute environmental break, and I'll ask you to strictly observe the five minutes. The alarm clock is running.

[The committee adjourned from 8:05 p.m. to 8:10 p.m.]

The Acting Chair: Okay. I'll ask everybody to be seated. We're going to resume the meeting. For the remainder of the meeting we'll be alternating between government and opposition members.

First on my list is Mr. Webber from Calgary. Mr. Webber, will you be combining your time with the minister?

Mr. Webber: Yes, I will. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Okay. The two of you have the floor for 20 minutes.

Mr. Webber: Great. Thank you. Wow, 20 minutes. Last night the chair allowed me five and a half minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Six and a half.

Mr. Webber: Six and a half. That's what it was. So I feel like I've hit the jackpot here tonight.

One thing, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask, though. Ms Notley requested a number of items from the minister. I hope that that will go through the chair and to all of us, of course.

Mr. Minister, it's an honour to be able to ask you some questions here tonight. I'm going to be jumping all over the place, so please bear with me. I'm going to start out with a media release that was issued on April 9 of this year regarding cash rebates for Albertans for them to become more energy efficient. It's "a new provincial consumer incentive program for energy efficient purchases that will help Alberta build a culture of conservation." I wouldn't mind getting a little bit more information from you with regard to this initiative. It says here that the province will be investing about \$36 million into this initiative over a three-year period. I'm curious to know where it is in your estimates, what line item it would be under. I was trying to search through that, so if you can provide me with that.

Also, do you feel that \$36 million is sufficient to encourage Albertans to become more energy efficient? I think of programs that are out there. For example, to purchase a refrigerator, would that be considered eligible for a cash rebate or if we were to go into something like purchasing a residential wind turbine? You know, it can be up to \$20,000 in an investment into a wind turbine. I'm wondering: is there a limit on claims that a person could claim with respect to this program? If you could give me some more detail on this particular program, that would be nice.

Mr. Renner: The program itself is included under climate change, so that's where you would find the dollars that are there. There was some carried forward from last year, and the dollars that are allocated specifically in this budget are about \$15 million this fiscal year and another \$15 million next fiscal year. It was announced as a \$36 million program because you still have this issue that we always have on adjusting from fiscal year to calendar year. Also, we're now into this current fiscal year, so it may not be entirely used up this year, depending upon how fast the applications come in.

I might add that I was talking with our folks at Climate Change Central, who are administering this program for us, and they've indicated that they're extremely pleased. We've had, I think, around 900 applications that have been processed so far. It's all done online, and it's working extremely well. The cheques should be flowing out in the next week to 10 days. It's a great launch.

Mr. Webber: Is it a percentage of expenses, or how does that work?

Mr. Renner: It depends upon a number of criteria. To specifically answer your question "Can you get a rebate for a fridge?" the answer is no because the reality is that you pretty much can't find a fridge that is not high efficiency. We're not going to incent someone to buy a new fridge when they have no choice but to buy the high-efficiency, energy efficiency rated fridge. But you can buy a washing machine because you still have your choice. The energy-efficient washing machines tend to be the ones that are front loading.

They use less water. They use less energy. So that is part of the program.

The other part of the program has to do with homes. There are incentives in place for assisting to get the energy assessment done on your home. That, combined with incentives that the federal government has and that some of the municipalities have also engaged in, should be, I think, a fairly significant boost for people to get the assessment done on their home.

There's no point in going out and spending money on your home unless you know where your problems are. It's, I believe, money well invested to have someone come in, do the analysis on your home, identify for you the areas that make the most sense for you to invest in. It might be that you need proper caulking around your windows or additional insulation in your attic or in your walls or any number of things. We felt that it would be putting good money after bad if we simply let people go out and do whatever they wanted to do and then send us their invoice without us actually knowing if it was going to do any good. So it's a two-part process. First of all, you have the analysis done on your home, which identifies for you what the areas are that you need to address. Once you have addressed those areas, you can apply for funding to help offset the costs. You can also apply for funding to help offset the cost of the energy efficiency analysis.

We also have funding in place for new homes. I think the wind turbine you talked about would be a bit of a stretch. I don't think it would cover that although the maximum amount of funding that's available for a new home is \$10,000. I'm told that in order to be eligible for that \$10,000, you would have to have your home at an EnerGuide 85, I think it is. To be at EnerGuide 85, you would have to have some form of capacity to be off grid, whether it would be a turbine or a solar panel or any number of things. You'll never achieve EnerGuide 85 simply by having an airtight, well-insulated home. The minimum that you need is EnerGuide 80. To get EnerGuide 80, you can do that with insulation, with properly sealed units, three-panel windows, and those kinds of things. I think that at that range it would be somewhere in the vicinity of around \$4,000 that you'd be eligible for.

The other area that we have included in this program is to encourage the transformation of our taxi fleet to hybrids. There is a program that's part of this to encourage taxi operators to convert to hybrids.

All of that being said, the reality is that the amount of money that we have available in this program is really, in my opinion, just getting us started. We really need to see how this program works, get a feel for the administration of the program, get a feel for the take-up of the program, and do some actual analysis to determine whether or not we're actually driving down CO₂. That's what it's all about. There's no point in doing it if we can't show that we're driving down CO₂. But at some point in time, I truly believe, there needs to be significantly more dollars allocated to programs like this, and it's something that I'll continue to work with over the next year or two.

Mr. Webber: Great. Thank you for that. I would agree. It would be nice to have a few more million dollars put into this program, administered by, you'd mentioned, Climate Change Central. Is that correct? Along with the taxi hybrid, that you mentioned, it's all done by Climate Change Central. I'm a little bit familiar with Climate Change Central. I understand that the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar serves on the board as well as you, Minister Renner. With respect to Climate Change Central, there are some ministry dollars going into this organization, not only yours but I

understand there are a number of other ministries in government that invest dollars into Climate Change Central. Can you give me an idea of what is invested with respect to your ministry in Climate Change Central?

8:20

Mr. Renner: Climate Change Central has been funded by our ministry as well as Energy through ongoing grants. That grant from Energy expired this year, so the support that flows through to Climate Change Central will be pretty much exclusively through Environment. It comes in two ways. One is a direct grant to help cover the base costs of the organization. We will also perhaps be looking at whether or not there could be a proportion of funding through the ecotrust fund that would flow into that organization. Plus, we pay them an administrative fee to deliver the energy efficiency program. So that's how we flow funds through into the organization. They do a significant amount of work, in some cases for other governments and in other cases for the private sector as well. Their annual budget to maintain their operation is more than just what we would contribute on an annual basis.

Mr. Webber: Okay. Great. Thank you, then.

Mr. Renner: It's about \$2 million.

Mr. Webber: Two million. That's what I was just going to ask: if you could give me a dollar figure there. Again, that would be in your estimates under the climate change area.

Mr. Renner: That's correct.

Mr. Webber: Great. All right. Well, I'm going to jump around here a little bit more. I've got some questions that some of my colleagues had requested that I ask. I don't think that they're going to have the time to be able to ask them tonight. They will be in the same predicament I was in the other night, where I had limited time to ask the questions.

I'll start with the climate change and emissions management fund. I know that there has been some money collected from industry since the inception of this fund. I'm just curious to know how much has been and how and when the funds will be made available. If you could answer that one for me.

Mr. Renner: The legislation has been in place since July of 2007. It will be administered on an annual basis, a calendar-year basis. For the first calendar year, 2007, it was in operation for only six months.

As you know, industry is compelled to reduce their intensity of emissions at the large industrial plants by 12 per cent. The compliance mechanism that they have is to either negotiate offsets with the unregulated sector – and a lot of those are through agriculture. There are some enhanced oil recovery, small CCS, projects that are already in place. Also, this year a significant amount of offsets were done through injection of acid gas, so sulphur operations. And agriculture: a significant amount of agricultural practices can reduce CO₂ emissions.

The other part of the compliance, of course, is to actually reduce emissions by making investment in the technology that they use, the way they do things, increasing the efficiency of the plant itself. The third is by making a contribution to an emissions management fund at the rate of \$15 a tonne. In the first six months that generated about \$40 million. That was to the end of the 2007 calendar year. To the end of the 2008 calendar year it was approximately \$82 million more. So there's about \$122 million that's available in that fund.

We will be very shortly announcing the independent board that will be responsible for administering that fund, led by sectoral representation from all the various industry players that pay into the fund. I would think it's reasonable to expect that they should be in a position to start to put dollars into various projects, be they research, pilot projects, demonstration projects, either later in this calendar year or early next calendar year.

You'll notice that there's \$95 million in this year's budget. That is a reflection of what we expect to come into this fund during calendar year 2009. It's on an accrual basis, so part of it will actually flow into 2010.

Mr. Webber: All right. Thank you. You had mentioned CCS projects and your pilot projects here. I'm jumping around, Mr. Minister. I'm going to go right into the carbon capture and storage initiative that this government has announced . . .

The Acting Chair: Five minutes remaining, Mr. Webber.

Mr. Webber: Thank you.

. . . the \$2 billion announcement with respect to carbon capture and storage. Now, I understand that the goal is to sequester about five megatonnes per year of CO₂ by 2015 on three to five specific projects. Now, of course, your ministry is involved in this as well as Energy. I guess I'm just a little bit concerned with the timelines here. I feel anxious. I feel like we've got to get going on these projects and that they've got to be announced quickly. I understand that they will be announced sometime in June. With respect to who's involved in choosing the specific projects, I understand that there's quite an interest, that a number of projects are on the table. Who's involved in choosing the particular projects for this \$2 billion? I'm just curious to know.

Mr. Renner: The actual allocation of the funds is the responsibility of the Minister of Energy. He is advised by a deputy ministers committee that has been going through a thorough analysis of the various RFPs that came forward. So the eventual decision will be Minister Knight's, not mine. Our involvement is that this is an important component in our go-forward strategy on having real reductions in CO₂. We need the development of the technology at the commercial scale, that these demonstration projects will bring on. We're there providing some technical advice, providing some background information, but it is an initiative of Alberta Energy. Environment is there in a supportive role.

Mr. Webber: Okay. Excellent. Looking into the future, do you foresee future government dollars going into further investment? I guess it all depends, of course, on how successful we are with these particular projects.

Mr. Renner: Yeah. I don't know that I want to get into speculating whether there'll be additional dollars. I do think, though, it's important that we note that the economic downturn has had some impact on this program as well. I think it's been widely publicized that some of the key players have had difficulty in putting together a project that would generate a sufficient amount of leveraging of the government dollars.

The Acting Chair: Two minutes remaining.

Mr. Renner: We're not about to give anybody a portion of this \$2 billion unless they put a significant amount of their own money in,

and there are some projects, I think, that have fallen off the table simply because they were unable to secure financing for their partner share. That being said, I also have no doubt that when the announcements are made in June, we will have a sufficient number of projects that have committed to get on and get these projects under way. But, like you, I recognize that we need to start to get the steel in the ground pretty darn soon if we're going to meet our 2015 deadline.

Mr. Webber: Exactly. Thank you.

I'm going to jump around here again. You had mentioned in one of your conversations, I think with Ms Notley, regarding the tailings pond technology and the new technology that perhaps, hopefully, will be implemented. I didn't want to bring up the ducks because the ducks issue was certainly a tragedy, but with the 500 ducks turning into over 1,600 ducks dying in these tailings ponds and a mere fraction of the oil sands mining area given a reclamation certificate, what is your ministry doing to assure Albertans and the world that the oil sands are not damaging the environment for eternity?

8:30

Mr. Renner: Well, there are a number of things. That's a pretty broad question, and I think we have 30 seconds to answer it. There are probably three areas. Very briefly, one is to work with industry and incent in some cases, use a stick in other cases to move forward the technology to reduce the dependence upon tailings ponds.

Perhaps I'll finish another time.

The Acting Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll move back to the opposition side, and I'll ask Ms Blakeman to speak again. Ms Blakeman, will you be sharing your time again?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I will. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm going to direct the minister's attention to monitoring, reporting, and innovation and the air and land policy, so items 2.0.1 and 2.0.2. I know that CASA is working on a strategic plan for Alberta's ambient air quality network. I'm wondering if there's money in the budget to support this exercise and to implement a new framework. You mentioned \$718,000 in response to a different question, so you may have answered it already. Is it that \$718,000? If it's not, can you expect the money to be there next year?

Mr. Renner: The \$718,000 is not involved with CASA.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Mr. Renner: That's for the airshed monitoring organizations that we have throughout the province. CASA is funded exclusively by Alberta Energy, so it's not in our budget. Nevertheless, we work very closely with them. Most of the projects that they have are energy-related projects . . .

I see the quizzed look on your face.

Ms Blakeman: No. It's just that I'm quizzing you.

Mr. Renner: . . . so that's the reason why Energy is funding. But they have been working on a number of projects with us, and some of them will deal with and will see their implementation through cumulative effects of one form or another.

Others are a little bit broader. One of the ones that I'm particularly interested in is the work that they did on monitoring tailpipe emissions and determining whether or not there would be significant impact on our air quality in our urban areas if we could have emphasis on removing a very small percentage of vehicles on our roads that are creating a significant amount of pollution. That's one of the areas where I would see over the next year or two or three us being able to move forward with them in putting some kind of a policy together on how we're going to have maximum effectiveness of implementation of new technology.

The federal government has talked about fuel efficiency standards, tailpipe emission standards. In the discussions that we've entered into with the Obama administration in the U.S., there are similar kinds of things. All of these things are just wonderful, but if you don't have a way of ensuring that you're removing the old technology, the old oil burners, from the road, the impact that you have by increasing the standards for the new vehicles is marginalized.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm going to ask a series of questions about air monitoring. How many air monitors are there in Alberta? How many are there per square kilometre? If I could get a breakdown in writing of how many monitors there are. How many are controlled by Alberta Environment, how many by industry, and how many by the airshed organizations? What are the parameters that each measures? You will know that I've had a series of questions about that in the past, so that's why I'm searching for the exact data. I'll let you answer those, and then I have a series of three more questions, also on air monitoring.

Mr. Renner: There are 12 permanent stations throughout the province, and then we operate, I think, at least one, if not two, mobile air monitoring stations that we can mobilize if we need to deal with specific instances. We are also looking at getting a number of the airsheds involved in more of a mobile monitoring situation. I give an example of Medicine Hat, which I'm most familiar with because I live there. There is one permanent monitoring station that's located just in the general downwind vicinity of where the industrial development is, and then also in that airshed they have mobile equipment that they can move around southern Alberta to deal with areas outside of the Medicine Hat area, like Brooks and some of the other areas, where there's getting to be more and more industrial development.

We also monitor not only industrial but agricultural development as well. When you're dealing with issues related to intensive livestock, for example, there are often complaints that are associated with that, where we want to put some mobile equipment in to do some analysis.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Maybe when your staff get a chance, I was looking for how many are controlled by the Department of Energy.

Mr. Renner: Yeah. We'll get the details back to you.

Ms Blakeman: Perfect. Thank you. How many of the air quality monitors in Alberta monitor for hydrogen sulphide? How are they distributed regionally? In other words, where are those monitors located?

Mr. Renner: Most of those technologies are in northern Alberta, but we can get that detail to you as well.

Ms Blakeman: Great.

Mr. Renner: Those are focused on the heavy industrial areas.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. How is the information from the industry monitors verified by the province?

Mr. Renner: Well, the same way as we verify anything else. There's an auditing provision. There is an expectation that they are appropriately qualified people that operate the monitoring.

I announced in the House today that we have just recently gone online with a program that will allow people to view our environmental assessment reports for contaminated land. We're working on a similar kind of an online reporting for our air quality monitoring as well. That's not up and running yet. But once we get the work done and are able to have a flow of data that's reliable, which would be updated on a consistent basis, we would hope that that kind of information would also be available through a website.

Ms Blakeman: Can you tell me how many times the air monitors in the oil sands regions were audited or inspected in 2008? How many times did they fail in 2008?

Mr. Renner: We'll get that information to you.

Ms Blakeman: Good. Can you tell me how many inspectors are on Alberta Environment's air quality and monitoring team and whether this number has changed over the last 10 years and whether there are any new inspectors that the minister would be adding to this team in the fiscal year that we have in front of us?

Mr. Renner: We will not be adding new inspectors. The inspectors that we have work in teams. I'll get you the overall numbers. You have to keep in mind that it's the nature of the business that people work together. If there is a need for a focus in a particular area of the province, they draw on resources from other areas of the province. When we're doing a focus on the Industrial Heartland or the oil sands region, we'll bring people in from throughout the province and gather there to deal with a specific instance. So at any given time there are resources that can be greatly expanded to deal with specific instances.

There are also two different streams of compliance officers. There are individuals that are responsible for doing inspections, and then there is also a different group that is responsible for doing investigations. They sometimes work in tandem. The inspector will identify an issue, and then the investigator will come in and do some detailed analysis. The investigators tend to be a lot more centred throughout the province and then brought in for specific instances, where they need to have that expertise in a concentrated way.

8:40

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I know that the media had documents that showed that in 2007 the provincial hourly air quality objective for hydrogen sulphide in the Athabasca oil sands area was exceeded 361 times. The questions around that are: how many times was this objective exceeded in 2008? When were the objectives exceeded? Where did this occur? In other words, which regions were affected? If I could get, just for comparison sake, how many times these objectives were exceeded in each of those regions, say, going back three years and six years.

Mr. Renner: Again, I don't have that information on the top of my head. We're well aware of the situation, industry is well aware of the situation, and there are a number of initiatives that have taken place to address the situation, from putting in new scrubbers to

investing in different and new technology. Some of it has to do with new facilities that are coming online. There tend to be some operational issues that need to be dealt with. It's just fine-tuning and allowing the equipment to function normally. It's almost like with any new piece of machinery, sometimes you actually have to tune it in and fine-tune it and get it to run to maximum efficiency. Sometimes there are exceedances that are associated with those kinds of instances. There also can be exceedances from time to time that are part of a start-up after a shutdown, a scheduled maintenance or something.

I think you have to put these numbers into the proper context. Yes, these numbers are large, and they're unacceptably large. We need to bring them down, but there are always going to be exceedances. The issue that we need to deal with is: are they within reasonable parameters? Are they something that is being dealt with in an appropriate manner, or is this an habitual issue, where clearly they're not abiding by the approvals that they have? In that case, then we have some compliance mechanisms at our doorstep. We can issue orders. We can go as far as going to charges, and that's what happened when we laid charges in the Firebag situation.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thanks. I'm just going through my notes, and I have an enormous amount of area to cover in seven and a half minutes, so I'm going to move on.

I did a bit of adding up of figures, and when I looked at the monitoring and evaluation sections – 2.0.2, 2.0.3, 2.0.4, 2.0.5., and 2.0.6 – what I'm seeing is a trend. Over the past couple of years the environmental assurance program has been restructured. Two years ago, in the '07-08 estimates, we had \$19.4 million allocated for monitoring and evaluation, \$6 million allocated for standards, \$1.6 million allocated for integrated information solutions, \$1.8 million for drinking water, \$10.6 million for innovation and policy, and \$3.6 million for climate change. Now, if you take out the climate change line item, which has grown considerably as a result of the \$52 million from the ecotrust, what you end up with is that in '07-08 the environmental assurance budget added up to \$39.3 million. This year the budget for environmental assurance, not including climate change again, is \$20.2 million, which is a fair cut. I'm wondering why we've seen such a reduction in the monitoring, reporting, and innovation budget allocation. Why has this provincial contribution to environmental assurance gone down by almost 50 per cent? That's a lot of difference.

Mr. Renner: Some of it relates to internal reallocation of resources. Some of the people that were formerly included in the budget in monitoring and reporting have now moved over to Al Sanderson's area and are working more on the strategic side of things, so that would explain where part of it went. We've reallocated to our priority areas.

I talked about it in my opening comments. There are a number of internal reallocations that we've made, so we have moved a significant portion of the monitoring, reporting, and innovation into the cumulative effects management program. The actual work that is going to be going into that, some of it in scientific analysis and consultants for the lower Athabasca, we've talked about a number of times. We put a great deal of emphasis on getting that basic knowledge in place for the lower Athabasca.

Some of it has moved into climate change, and some of it has moved into water for life. So a very significant portion of that reduction that you've identified is still within the department; it's just moved into other areas.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. If you can give me the amounts and where they moved to, in writing, that would be very helpful.

I'm going to move to compliance and enforcement. I'm referencing 4.0.3. If Alberta Environment was going to audit every site that it is responsible for in one year, how many audits or inspections would they be conducting, and how has this number changed over the last 10 years?

Mr. Renner: I don't think there's any way to answer that question. We could conduct inspections at every site every day of the year, and it would be thousands. The way we determine how to allocate our resources is based on the degree of risk to public safety and also on the history of the operator. So if we have operators that have shown us that they are capable of conducting themselves in an appropriate manner – we have an EnviroVista program, where they have an exemplary performance record – the amount of on-site inspections would be dramatically lower than for someone who has a history of having enforcement orders and exceedances and the like. Obviously, that's an area where we would concentrate.

So I don't think it's possible to say how many would be the ideal or how many would be necessary. We believe that we are conducting an appropriate amount. I would say that what we deliver is what is necessary. Could we do more? Sure. Would more inspections result in better outcomes? I don't think so. I doubt that it would.

Ms Blakeman: Can you tell me how many of these you did, say, in '08, '07, and '06, then? Can you give me those numbers?

Mr. Renner: We'll get those numbers.

The Acting Chair: There are two minutes remaining, Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm talking as fast as I can.

I want to go to land reclamation, the security deposits. This is around the Auditor General's report. There have been three different occasions where he has recommended that the department address the risks related to financial security for land disturbances throughout the province. In response to the most recent one the department promised to develop a risk-focused asset-to-liability model to calculate security needed in mining and oil and gas sectors. Is this model complete, and has it been implemented?

8:50

Mr. Renner: The model is almost complete, so the answer, therefore, is no. It has not been implemented. It is a very complex process. When you talk about a risk-based security system, that doesn't necessarily mean that it is a direct, one-to-one relationship with the cost of reclamation. Risk-based means that you associate the risk to the public purse with the disturbance, so in theory if there is no risk to the public, there would be no deposit, and that's unacceptable to government and to me as the minister. I can't see a situation where we would not have a deposit. On the other hand, you don't have to have zero risk and have a dollar-for-dollar deposit because, clearly, most operators are in a position . . .

The Acting Chair: Mr. Minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but I need to move back to the government members' side.

Mr. Griffiths, will you be sharing your time with the minister?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes.

The Acting Chair: Okay. The two of you have the floor for 20 minutes.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much. Minister, I apologize if my first question has been asked before, if I perhaps missed it over the last couple of hours. It comes from page 127 of the business plan, under ministry statement of operations and expenses, climate change. I'm sorry if I missed the answer, but I'm curious that the budgeted amount for '08-09 was \$62,377,000, and the forecast actual was \$10,410,000. Then, of course, it goes back up. It carries on as though more money was going. Perhaps it's my Public Accounts background. Why so little last year and then the expectation it will continue to rise from where you budgeted it for last year?

Mr. Renner: I don't know if the question was asked before specifically, but the answer was given before. That's the ecotrust fund, the \$52 million in ecotrust. It was in last year's budget. It didn't get spent for a number of reasons. It was to be \$52 million a year for three years starting last year, and now it's going to be \$52 million a year for three years starting this year. It's been added on to year 4, so the dollars are still there.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. I did hear that answer. I didn't realize that was part of the climate change. Thank you for clarifying that.

Also from my Public Accounts days I have a couple of questions about performance measures. I'm on page 121, river water quality index. I'm wondering, utilizing those sorts of targets, to get six out of six river systems to have good to excellent water quality: how do you measure that, and is that really a fair measurement? I know the river systems are dirtier in the spring when everything is melting and flowing in, and they're dirtier in the fall when the water flow slows right down and everything starts to settle, so how do you measure that, and is that really a fair way to measure the quality of water?

Mr. Renner: Well, I think it's a fair way to measure the quality of water. It's based largely on turbidity and on the testing that we do on an ongoing basis, but clearly in some years, particularly the years where we've had flood conditions, we've not been able to meet that test.

On the other hand, I think that it is reasonable for us to have a target of six out of six. When we don't achieve that target, if it's due to natural causes, I'm perfectly happy to stand up and explain to someone why we didn't meet that target. What I have a great deal of concern with is us saying: look, you know, in many years we have flood conditions, we have natural conditions that cause us not to meet that target, so we should maybe make that target five out of six instead of six out of six. Well, what that says to me as a casual observer – if I was in the public in Alberta reading that, I would say: “Well, Environment is prepared to give one of our river systems a free pass, and it's our river that's going to be the one. They're still meeting their targets, and our river is not acceptable quality.”

It's one of those measurements that may not be achieved, but you can't possibly set a target that is less than six out of six. As long as the reason that you don't achieve the target is that it's due to natural cause, then I'm not concerned. But if we're not meeting our six out of six and it's due to man-made causes, then I think that's cause for concern, and we should be able to identify that.

Mr. Griffiths: Good. Well, I wasn't so much concerned about six out of six rivers. It was just what you're measuring. If you're measuring turbidity and other factors, what about man-made pollution? How much of the measurement of water quality is, you know, a measurement of man-made sewage and other contaminants that might lower the quality of the water as opposed to natural causes?

Mr. Renner: The basic four that we monitor for are metals, heavy metals of one kind or another; bacteria, which is the area that flooding has a huge influence on; nutrients, which tend to be related to municipal waste water of one kind and to some degree runoff from agricultural areas and also has a degree of fluctuation based upon natural causes; and pesticides.

Pesticides are one that we have a huge amount of influence over from human interaction. That's one of the reasons why we moved this year to ban the use of weed and feed because we started to see incidents where the pesticides that were being measured in our rivers were higher downstream of urban areas than they were in the agricultural areas. Everybody was always blaming agriculture on pesticides in the water system, but the reality is that our monitoring has indicated that we have higher concentrations of pesticides downstream of urban centres than we do in rural areas. That's an indication that we have a whole lot of people that like to keep their lawns green and weed free the easy way, and that's having an impact on our rivers. So after this year they won't be able to do that anymore.

Mr. Griffiths: You read my mind. I was going to ask after the pesticides if your monitoring helped bring us to the conclusion to get rid of weed and feed. You're a forecaster, prognosticator.

Page 124, 4(a), the personal engagement indicator – I'm always curious about performance measures that basically ask people to evaluate themselves – that “measures the percentage of Albertans that describe themselves as actively engaged in energy, waste or water conservation.” I'm wondering if it would be better or if it's possible or if you're planning on moving to measure how many water meters there are within municipalities? What percentage of the province is covered? How many municipalities use blue bag systems for recycling? With those sorts of things, you know, whether people are moving to smaller vehicles or different vehicles that would improve energy efficiency, we could actually measure what people were doing rather than having them evaluate themselves.

Mr. Renner: I have no objection to us having a look at what kind of performance measures that we use. The difficulty is being able to have performance measures that have a degree of accuracy. Water meters are probably relatively easy to do, although easier said than done. We tend to use the kinds like we have here because you can do a poll. In this particular one the polling company that does the work for us uses what they call a birthday method to ensure that they get a cross-section of individuals, so it has a higher degree of randomness. From the point of view of accuracy and randomness it's verifiable. I do agree that it does rely a lot on self-designation.

9:00

I don't know how many people, when they're called by a pollster saying, “Are you actively involved in saving energy?” would say no. We definitely have some work to do on it, but I think it does reflect a degree of public involvement and public awareness because the numbers have been changing over time. If nothing else, it tells us something.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Thank you. I think we have a pretty good water allocation system, but we do have challenges sometimes around how it operates. I mean, being a rural MLA, it was very frustrating to see a packing plant located just outside of Calgary not be able to get water from the city even though, my understanding is, they have an allocation that's much larger than the population they need to represent. In the business plan it talks about reviewing and

renewing the water allocation strategy. Are those some of the issues you hope to address? What exactly are the renewal and the review? How are you going to go about it? What is it going to accomplish?

Mr. Renner: Yeah, very much so; that's one of the things that is a priority. There are also issues that we need to deal with respecting water that is theoretically allocated, theoretically being used but that we know practically is not. So when we get involved, as we see right now, in the very early stage, very rudimentary market where you can be trading water licences, we don't want to get into a situation where people are trading air as opposed to water. Someone shouldn't be in a position where they can transfer a portion of their water licence, but in reality it's a portion that they never used in the first place.

That's where you get into a situation like you referred to with Calgary. If Calgary has a very large licence, we have to have a better handle on what portion of that licence is actually being used and that when we figure out what our overall allocation policy is, we take into account all of the water use.

Keep in mind also – and this is critical – people tend to look at municipalities for these huge water licences that they hold, but municipalities are some of the few water users that return all or most of their licence back into the river. So from a perspective of a healthy ecosystem, apart from the fact that they sometimes don't return it as clean as we would like, they do return in some cases even more because of runoff and storm sewers and everything. You have to be careful that you don't look and say: well, there's a whole bunch of water there that we should be using somewhere else. We depend on that water coming back into the river. If you put that into industrial use, you could have some impact on the river. It's an overall review on the water.

Increasingly, I think, it's becoming clear that as we have seen the advent of water meters in urban areas, we're going to have to start investing in the necessary infrastructure so that we can put water meters throughout the rest of the system as well. I was down in Milk River a couple of weeks ago. They're piloting a system of remote metering for the private irrigators that pump into the Milk River. These things are cellphone technology. When the pump is operating, there's an impeller that turns the meter over, and every half hour or hour it beams back to a central data collection facility what the readings are on those meters. So we can have real-time, ongoing monitoring of the water use that's going on in that river. It's really critical there because that's the river we share with Montana, so we really have to be sure that we know.

That kind of real-time, ongoing monitoring for water use is probably going to be necessary in the future if we're going to be able to manage in a practical way and ensure that we continue to have growth and still have adequate water.

Mr. Griffiths: My next question is one that I don't have an answer for.

Mr. Renner: And you expect me to have an answer?

Mr. Griffiths: My grandpa always told me: don't ask a question if you don't anticipate what the answer will be.

You know, we use the market system for pretty much everything: for food, for fuel, for books, you name it. The market system works because then you wind up with an efficient use of those resources. Whoever can buy the most, when they use it as inputs, obviously, they can get more value out of it once they use it. But there's something that concerns everybody – and I'm no different – about a market system for water.

Now, I know Australia has developed a market system for water, which has been expensive, and they've had a lot of bugs. I'm wondering if you've considered when, at some point, we may have to move to some sort of market system for water to make sure we get the best, most efficient use of the water and in order to balance competing interests in the water rather than the government deciding: you get it this time; you get it next time. Are you watching what's happening in Australia? It's very interesting.

Mr. Renner: Well, we're watching Australia. We're watching a number of other jurisdictions. I talked about the fact that the institute is doing a jurisdictional analysis for us. I don't think that there is any doubt that we will see some form of market-based instruments used in some part of our water allocation system. I think what we have to watch very closely is that we don't have a result with unintended consequences like they saw in Australia when they brought this system in.

I talked about the fact that if you can sell a portion of your licence that you actually never used to someone who intends to use it instead of actually conserving water, we've now begun using more water than we've ever used before. They ran into that in Australia. They also ran into a situation where people were selling surface rights to water and then relying more on groundwater and then depleting their groundwater reserves to the point that the connectivity between groundwater and surface water was compromised.

I don't think that there is anything magical about market systems. I think we're experiencing the magic of market systems with the economic meltdown that we had, that markets are accused of driving. So there is and will always be a significant role for government in dealing with this resource.

This is a Crown-owned resource. Nobody owns water. The Crown owns the water. People have the right to use a portion of that water at any given point in time, and the ability to trade the rights to use the Crown's water could be driven in some form or other through market instruments, but at the end of the day we have to ensure that we have the ability to protect the environment, that we have the ability to protect the First Nations, who need to be part of any kind of system, and that we have the ability to protect the human needs that are associated with that water. How all of that comes together in some kind of a new system will make for, I'm sure, a very interesting discussion come this fall.

The Acting Chair: There are two minutes remaining.

Mr. Griffiths: I'm very relieved by that answer, that you understand all the balances. I hope you're the gentleman that steers us through this in the years to come.

I have one final question. Between regional water systems and municipal water systems and waste-water systems and all the infrastructure that needs to go in to tie all that together, do we have any idea how much money we're talking about over the next few years, over the lifetime? This is a lot of infrastructure to go into water, waste water, regional systems.

Mr. Renner: Well, it's in the billions. The pent-up demand is incredible. We have \$100 million a year. So at \$100 million a year, 10 years is a billion dollars, and I would suggest that that still wouldn't cover it. It's something that I think as a society we're going to have to look at. Is this something that the government can solely be responsible for, or are we going to have to face the hard reality that the cost of delivering water is something that everyone is going to have to pay a higher portion of?

9:10

Most of these regional projects that we're talking about are financed right now on a 90 to 10 funding formula, so 90 per cent by the province, 10 per cent by the municipality. The municipality may or may not pass the cost of that 10 per cent on to the water users. When they do, in many cases they get complaints from the water users that the cost is too high. It's 10 per cent. Ninety per cent is being borne by the province. There may come a point in time when we all have to recognize that there are going to be significant costs in ensuring that we have safe and secure water for all Albertans.

The Acting Chair: I need to interject here. The time has expired. I need to move back to the opposition side.

Before I proceed with the next speaker, I'd like to extend thanks on the record to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for her generosity and fairness in ceding her position at this point to allow the third party a few additional moments of debate. The standing orders provide no guidance on this, so I thank you, Ms Blakeman.

Ms Notley, you have 18 minutes and 20 seconds to share with the minister.

Mr. Renner: I'm not so sure I share all of that gratitude, but fire away.

Ms Notley: It would have been one of us. It would be about the same, I'm sure.

I'd like to just go back a little bit to some issues that were already being discussed, and particularly we were talking a bit about compliance and enforcement. I'd just like to go back to that really quickly. You had of course been talking about the whole issue of not needing to inspect all sites because there were some that showed good behaviour, and presumably where they show good behaviour, there's not a need to be there. However, I guess I'm still a little bit unclear because if primarily you're relying on self-reporting as evidence of good behaviour, how do we get around the process where sites, if they're not necessarily being regularly inspected, are simply not reporting their bad behaviour? Maybe, in fact, there is more proactive inspection out there than I'm aware of.

I'd like to sort of go to a specific area. I know that your ministry has talked with our staff about the type of groundwater monitoring that is done by industry as a condition of their licences, their approvals. I'm wondering if you could give me numbers in terms of the percentage of approvals that have that as a condition that are actually inspected by the ministry independent from industry report of there being an issue.

Mr. Renner: Well, it would depend upon what the approval is and what the nature is. If the nature of the approval is one that would pose a risk to groundwater, then groundwater monitoring would be part of that approval process. So we would say: "Here's your operating authority. You can operate this facility. You'll have to have three or four different groundwater monitoring wells that are put in place and report to us what the results of those tests are on an ongoing basis. From time to time we will come through your facility and verify that the numbers that you have been giving us are correct. Maintain logs; maintain records." It's no different than someone coming into your place of business and saying: I want to see your financial records to make sure that you've been paying the taxes that you owe us.

Ms Notley: Absolutely. So what I'm asking for because as we've discussed in the past – you know, I've heard concerns expressed that that type of inspection is not something that can be adequately done

anymore on the part of staff. If that's incorrect, that's fine. What I'd like to know, then, is the number of licences that have that groundwater monitoring by industry as a condition and then from that the frequency of inspection, again, as I say, independent of industry self-reporting that there has been a problem, just spot checks, as a proportion of those licences and how many times that occurs on an annual basis, a monthly basis, however you keep those stats. That's the information I'm looking for.

Mr. Renner: I'll get that information for you. I don't have it.

I do want to address your opening comments when you talked about – well, I made the reference to EnviroVista, for example.

Ms Notley: I'm sorry. To what?

Mr. Renner: EnviroVista partners.

Ms Notley: Right.

Mr. Renner: Those are the companies that we have a partnership, an agreement with that have proven themselves to be good performers. That doesn't give them a free pass. That doesn't mean that they're never going to get inspected. It just means that we're going to put our emphasis on others and inspect them less often, but they still get inspected.

I just enrolled – I don't know if anyone else has – in the NEXUS program as a trusted traveller to the U.S. and Canada. They made it incredibly clear to me that in giving me this card that makes me a trusted traveller, I will be subject to periodic audits, and if I ever get caught, there's a zero tolerance policy. They will immediately remove my card and never give it back. We would look at it in a similar manner.

Ms Notley: Absolutely. I'm just looking for how the ministry is doing in terms of its periodic auditing capacity, you know, over a couple of years but even in the last year, as a percentage of those which have been told that they will be periodically audited. That's the info I'm looking for, particularly as it relates to groundwater monitoring and where that's a condition of the approval.

I'd like to go on to another issue attached to that, where your ministry receives reports, either from industry or from the public, and your staff then review them. I know that your ministry identifies those which have been satisfactorily completed, and I know that there are certain categories of what constitutes satisfactorily completed. Amongst those groups that get the SC rating, I'm wondering if you can provide for me the number which get that rating as a result of one of the two following categories: one, where there's insufficient evidence to warrant further investigation; two, where there's insufficient evidence to support an enforcement response. Those are the two. The other piece I'd like to know is: how many of those notifications result in some type of penalty just as a percentage, a number of your overall? I know you've got it broken down by the number of reports that you receive, so if we could just get how many result in a penalty.

Mr. Renner: I'll try and get that information for you. It may not be sorted in that particular manner. It might be easier said than done, but we'll get the best proxy that we can to provide you with that information. I would hate to think that we have to manually search through reams and reams of information to provide that information, but if we have something that will provide you with a reasonably good proxy or, in fact, if we have that within an electronic database that can be manipulated, we'll get it for you.

Ms Notley: I would expect that your penalties at the very least ought to be traceable.

Mr. Renner: Well, that's easy. We can give you that.

Ms Notley: Okay. That's great.

Mr. Renner: It's just the part, you know, about insufficient evidence.

Ms Notley: How that's broken down.

Mr. Renner: Yeah.

9:20

Ms Notley: Right. Okay. That's great.

I'd just like to go back, then, to item 2.0.1, that the Member for Edmonton-Centre had been talking about, the monitoring, reporting, and innovation line item. She had talked about the sort of global decrease in that funding over the last few years. I'd like to narrow it down just a little bit from this last year to this year, the roughly \$3.7 million, or I suppose it would be about 20 per cent. I just wanted to try and clarify what the answer was. Are you suggesting that that 20 per cent reduction in that line item, all of it, can be found in other areas, or is there a portion that was actually cut? If so, what was cut? What service is not being performed anymore?

Mr. Renner: The majority of it is reallocated to other areas, but I don't want to leave you with the impression that there will not be impact in some of the areas. When we reallocate funding from one area to another, if we have an ongoing program of monitoring – and I've talked already about how we are reducing the amount of groundwater monitoring from 50 to 30 wells annually.

Ms Notley: I thought that was in the water for life that that reduction took place.

Mr. Renner: It's in both. We've transferred some of this money into water for life.

There will be instances where there will be a reduction in monitoring in some areas. Let's just talk about some of the areas where there will be some changes. I can't give you the specific dollar figures simply because at this stage we haven't even determined specifically where those dollars are going to come from. We're at the stage where we've identified some areas where we believe we have some room to manoeuvre, but we'll go through those with the people that are delivering the programs on the ground and find out if what looked like a good idea at this level actually is practical and is doable.

We're looking at reviewing whether the acid deposition monitoring network that we have in place needs to be supported at the same level. That is acid rain and ongoing monitoring, again, very long term. Is that an area where we might be able to back off for a year or two and not compromise either our long-term planning or our long-term trends, or would it compromise our ability to ensure that we're doing work on airshed, for example, because that's a factor of airshed work? I already talked about groundwater.

Hydrometric monitoring. This is baseline data, again, that we've been working on to give us a better idea of our inventory of local water supplies, local and regional water issues, and flood forecasting. Is there an area in there that we have the ability to slow down? We're doing mapping right now of all of the flood plains throughout the province. Well, that was an ongoing program with significant

dollars that were committed in each year. Is it going to compromise significantly our ability to do our job if we delay or slow up the rate at which we develop that flood plain mapping? That's another area that we're looking at.

Land monitoring. We do core monitoring based on reclamation criteria in industrial sites. Again, is that something that we need to do on an ongoing basis, or should we be focusing only on the sites that are most intensive and ensure that we've got sufficient information on the sites that are being reclaimed as opposed to a number of sites that we've identified and we maybe haven't done all of the work that's necessary to isolate plumes? Again, we need that information. Eventually it will need to be done, but does it need to be done this year? Don't know. We're working on reviewing that.

Finally, surface water quality, recreational lakes. Clearly, we need to stay with that. There's a human health risk there. We also have parameters that need to be monitored from more of a long-term, trending perspective. That's an area where instead of doing the lake monitoring for some of the more remote lakes on an annual or biannual basis, we may be able to maybe test every three years instead of every two years or every two years instead of one year. That's an area where we believe we can have a minimal impact in the long term but be able to generate some additional dollars that we can use for this reallocation.

Ms Notley: Okay. Maybe I'll just jump really quickly. I'm just looking at my watch, and I don't want to miss this one. It's going to sort of sound like a little bit of a gotcha thing, and it's not meant to. It's just that I keep realizing that I forget to mention this piece. Within the context of discussing all these different areas that we're cutting, why is it that we have increased the ministry's communications line item by about 80 per cent?

Mr. Renner: Oh, you know, I've been waiting for that question all night long.

Ms Notley: Have you? Well, there you go.

Mr. Renner: There are two reasons. One is because we have consolidated the minister's correspondence unit within that division. I get hundreds of letters, as many ministers do. Believe it or not, I don't actually write them all myself. The way it used to work is that if we'd get a complaint from somebody or a letter or anything, a letter that comes in from an Albertan somewhere, it would be funneled from the minister's office all the way back out into the field to the individual that would be responsible for that particular program in the field. It was their job to write a letter that would be drafted for the minister's signature, and then it would float all the way back into the minister's office.

There were two problems with that. An inordinate amount of time was being taken by people that have expertise out in the field writing minister's correspondence, that we didn't feel was the best use of their time. Secondly, it was very difficult to have some consistency. Every letter that came out of the minister's office looked like it was being written by somebody else, and they were. What we do now is we've got a core team of five people that do minister's correspondence. All of those field people are still involved, but instead of actually drafting the letter, what they do is provide the key information about what the essence of this issue is. We have this correspondence team who are responsible for gathering all that information and then putting together the correspondence.

The Acting Chair: Two minutes remaining.

Mr. Renner: The other area where there was an increase in communications this year is that we have instituted someone who is responsible for our social media web development, both internal and external. We've spent a lot of time and effort on putting together and beefing up our internal Internet-based system. We have an internal website just like our external website, so all of our employees can keep track of what's going on. They're spread out through the entire province. It's the only way that we can really keep everybody informed on what's going on. So we've added one person who's responsible for that as well.

Ms Notley: Well, I'm sure you won't be surprised to hear me say that those particular strategies are probably not ones that people in the community who are concerned about environmental issues would have identified as one of the priorities.

Mr. Renner: Well, they would be if they wrote me a letter and got a lousy response.

Ms Notley: Well, I guess, but you're still getting the same information. It's really just about the crafting at this point. I suspect people are a little bit less concerned about the crafting than you think.

Okay. I guess I'll just really quickly go back to the folks that are looking at the approvals. I think it's primarily doing the EIAs and in the oil sands. Can you get for the committee a breakdown of the number of applications that are approved versus rejected and then as well the number of EIAs which have conditions on them versus not?

Mr. Renner: I really would like to answer that question.

The Acting Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded. Minister Renner, your office will be notified by e-mail from the clerk that there are commitments to provide additional material, and the appropriate timing and tabling of those will be provided in that e-mail.

Speaking of the clerk, I want to thank Karen Sawchuk for her always efficient and professional assistance. By the powers vested in me as the temporary chair of this committee, I hereby grant you the rest of the day off, Karen.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) this meeting is adjourned. Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 9:30 p.m.]

