



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Resources and Environment

Department of Environment
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 16, 2010
6:30 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC), Chair
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL), Deputy Chair
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL)*, Acting Deputy Chair, March 16, 2010

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Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC)
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Department of Environment Participant

Hon. Rob Renner Minister

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[Mr. Prins in the chair]

**Department of Environment
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Well, good evening, everyone. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment meeting. We have under consideration tonight the estimates of the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011.

What we'll do is go around the table and introduce ourselves. I'll ask the minister to introduce your guests as well. My name is Ray Prins, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Chase: And the vice-captain on your flight tonight is Harry Chase from Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. VanderBurg: George VanderBurg, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. Jacobs: Broyce Jacobs, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Weadick: Greg Weadick, Lethbridge-West, sitting in for Evan Berger.

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

Ms Notley: Rachel Notley, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Dallas: Good evening, everyone. Cal Dallas, Red Deer-South.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister. Introduce yourself and your guests.

Mr. Renner: Okay. I'm Rob Renner, MLA for Medicine Hat and, for the purpose of this evening, Minister of Environment. Mr. Chairman, if I could, I would also like to introduce the members of my staff that have joined us this evening. I'll be relying on the two folks on either side of me to assist me with the questions, but we may be receiving some notes from others. On my right is Jim Ellis, deputy minister, and on my left is the SFO, senior financial officer, Mike Dalrymple. Also with us this evening: Ernie Hui, assistant deputy minister, environmental assurance; Rick Brown, assistant deputy minister, environmental management; Bev Yee, assistant deputy minister, environmental stewardship; Al Sanderson, assistant deputy minister, strategic support and integration; as well as Mark Cooper, director of communications; Roger Ramcharita, my executive assistant; Jeff Kasbrick, special assistant for my office; and Martin Krezalek, who is the EA to the deputy minister. That's the great team that I have with me. I'll be relying on many of them tonight, just like I do for every other day that we have in Alberta Environment.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Renner.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: We have a few items to deal with first. We do have a notice of motion, so I'm going to call on George VanderBurg for a motion.

Mr. VanderBurg: I'll make a motion to designate the MLA for Calgary-Varsity as deputy chair for tonight's meeting only.

The Chair: You've heard the motion. All in favour? Opposed? That's carried. Welcome, Mr. Chase, as the deputy chair for tonight only.

We'll go over a bit of a review of the process. Standing Order 59.01(4) prescribes the sequence as follows. Firstly, the minister may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes; for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of the third party may speak; then the fourth party for 20 minutes after that; and any member may speak after that. After the first hour we'll take a five-minute break, and the debate will conclude at 9:30 or earlier if no further questions arise.

With that, I will ask the minister to proceed for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank everyone for your attendance tonight. Going through the estimates for Alberta Environment I think is critical for a number of reasons. First of all, I'm very proud of the work that all of my folks have done. But, also, in this time of government restraint and dealing with the budget that was introduced a while ago, I think this is a great opportunity for me as minister to clarify the way that we intend to carry out the business that we have.

Our core business is protecting the environment. We are certainly confident that we will do that with the dollars that are provided for us, I guess provided that you vote to give us the dollars that we have in this budget. We have found some savings in this budget, and it will be reflected in the documents that you have before us, but I wanted to reiterate that we are absolutely confident that we will be able to carry out our essential business and our strategic priorities.

Just through sort of the high level, Budget 2010 includes about \$96 million for environmental management, and within that area we deal with compliance, enforcement, regulatory work, approvals, and environmental inspections. We also have in our estimates \$141 million for climate change and clean energy initiatives. The breakdown there is roughly \$78 million for the climate change emissions management fund, \$46 million in the Ecotrust fund – we can talk about that a little later; that's transfers from the federal government – and \$17 million that's spread out throughout the department, which includes energy efficiency initiatives. We also have under water for life about \$88 million: \$19 million within Alberta Environment's budget, an additional \$25 million is cross-ministry, and capital of \$63 million that is being used towards provincial contribution to regional drinking water and wastewater projects.

Overall, we have seen our budget decrease from \$347 million last year to \$307 million this year. That amounts to a budget reduction of about \$40 million. I want to point out, though, that the actual reduction that we needed to find within our department was 17 and a half million dollars. The reason for that is that \$17 million of that \$40 million was due to lower than expected revenues from the climate change emissions management fund, and those are flow-through dollars that do not affect our budget. We can explore the reason for that a little later if you like. There was \$6 million that was deferral on the Ecotrust fund and so, again, did not affect our operational dollars. That left us with about 17 and a half million dollars that we needed to manage within Alberta Environment.

I want to just briefly go through some of the areas where we had some reductions. Like all government departments we found cost savings last year as a result of the hiring freeze, wage freeze, and bonus freeze for managers; reductions to discretionary spending such as travel, hosting, and overtime. We also made reductions by limiting contract spending, significantly reducing sponsorship and advertising, and delaying the replacement of computer hardware.

The outreach program that I was very proud of, quite frankly, and disappointed to have to reduce in scope, the one simple act program, has been scaled back from the on-the-ground, in-your-face kind of a program that it was to making much more use of social media. We won't be participating in public events. The program will continue, but it will be done on an electronic basis rather than an in-person basis.

Policy development assistance from outside contractors has been reduced. That will result in some lower priority policy development moved a little bit less aggressively.

I want to point out that we have maintained our energy efficiency consumer rebate program; however, we have reduced the development of the energy efficiency program in the business sector. That has been put on hold.

6:40

The frequency of long-term trend monitoring has been re-examined. We have the capacity to do compliance, enforcement, and regulatory work. I want to make it clear that neither is the ability to respond to environmental emergencies impacted at all as a result of this budget. There are no changes to monitoring required under approvals. These industry requirements are part of operating licences, and in high-development areas and areas near municipalities we'll continue to maintain a high level of air and water quality monitoring.

There are some lower development areas not near municipalities where we will reduce the frequency of monitoring. For instance, in lakes and rivers that have shown little or no variance over a prolonged period of time, we will reduce the frequency of the monitoring. We will not eliminate the monitoring, but we will reduce the frequency of monitoring. The purpose of that kind of monitoring is really to establish trends, to be aware of any particular changes that need to be addressed, and we can do that with less frequency. This risk-based approach allows us to provide good trend analysis and still maintain environmental protection.

We've been able to fund some of the organizations based on efficiencies found in the '09-10 budget. As a result, all of our WPACs – that's the watershed advisory councils – and key partners have been notified of continued core funding through stable multiyear grants and, like government, will have to focus on their priorities.

Mr. Chairman, just let me conclude by assuring all of the members of the committee that this budget protects our core programs, takes action on strategic priorities, follows through on our commitment to being fiscally responsible but at the same time recognizes that we have a critical role to play in protecting not only Alberta's environment but, increasingly, Alberta's international reputation as environmental stewards.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'm more than prepared to take questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Renner.

Mrs. Blakeman will be asking the first round of questions for an hour, I guess. I would ask if it is your intention to combine your time going back and forth.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, it is. And it's Ms Blakeman.

The Chair: Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for appearing before the committee tonight. Also, thanks and welcome to all of the staff. You're working another evening, and I do appreciate that on behalf of the people in Alberta.

I know that one of the staff had come to see some of the researchers in the caucus office and put forward that they didn't understand the value of the questions we were asking at the end of the debates, and if we could just pick five that we really wanted and forward those in writing, that would be really helpful. I understand that, happily, none of you have ever worked in opposition caucuses, and I wouldn't wish that upon any of you, but please believe me when I say that we ask questions that we really want the answers to. I don't have time to dream up ones I don't want the answers to. We do it because it's very hard to get information about what government is doing. So while you may not be able to see the value in that, please trust me that there is value to it.

The other thing is that we've had complaints from people who listen to the audio. They find it very frustrating when we've asked a question on the record, but the answer comes in written form often many months or weeks later. So it's hard for them to follow the debate. But we do run out of time. In one hour – and I've now used 90 seconds explaining why I'm asking questions to you all – we can't possibly get all the questions that we want to ask on the record for you, so you'll just have to bear with me. I'm sorry if I can't talk fast enough to get all my questions on, but at the end all those I haven't got on I'm going to read into the record. So thank you for your assistance on that.

Now, what I'm going to do, Mr. Minister, is walk through nine sections. I'm going to start talking about federal transfers; then cumulative effects management; the land-use framework; reclamation; climate change and the climate change emissions management fund; water; air quality monitoring; alternative energy, energy conservation, and energy efficiency – that's all one section – and then I have some kind of drabs and drabs of questions at the end. They're all referenced on pages 111 to 122 of the 2010-13 business plan, pages 171 to 185 in the estimates, and the fiscal plan 2010-13. Those are your references. I'll give you page references and vote references as I go.

Referencing page 182 and also vote 3.0.2, the transfers from the government of Canada. Is that all that's in this budget that is federal transfers? Is that the sum total of federal transfers? Is that the only place it turns up?

Mr. Renner: That's the total of federal transfers that end up in my budget, that we are responsible for in Environment. It was a one-time grant of approximately \$150 million. The advancing of the Ecotrust fund is based upon an application process. To date we have expended, as you can see in the budget, about \$70 million. I can go through the exact numbers for you.

There are a number of applications that are in process, and we anticipate that we'll conclude the discussions on that. There's a lot of due process that's involved in these. Once a decision has been made to award, there are requirements in many cases for matching dollars that need to be secured, there's a fairly detailed agreement that needs to be put in place, and some of those cross over fiscal years. That's the reason why dollars end up being lapsed from one year to the next, just because the sequence of delivering this program is not necessarily coincidental with the fiscal year that the government of Alberta operates under.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So that's why we're seeing on page 182 under transfers from government of Canada that the budget from '09-10 was \$51 million and change, almost \$52 million, the actual forecast was \$32.4 million, and this year your budget is \$45,644,000? Okay. Good. Thank you very much.

Mr. Renner: A total of \$155 million.

Ms Blakeman: So there's some more coming next year?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. That's your final year? Is that your final offer?

Mr. Renner: Well, we've already received the money. We got \$155 million from the federal government. We're allocating it as these projects come forward.

Ms Blakeman: So year 1 was last year, year 2 is this year, and year 3 is next year?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Good. Thank you very much for that. Just so I can give you some context to where I'm coming from, in the environmental policy that I developed for the Official Opposition our leading statement is: the Liberal vision for Alberta is one in which we are a world leader on environmental issues, including climate change, sustainable development, and water protection.

Under that heading I want to talk about cumulative effects management. It's referred to throughout your business plan. Last year I dug hard to try and figure out exactly what you meant by that. I'm going to try again. Can you give me a definition of what exactly cumulative effects management is?

Mr. Renner: I would define cumulative effects management as moving the regulatory regime from one being centred on inputs, being very prescriptive in nature, to one that is outcome focused. To put it into very plain language, instead of us telling someone what we expect them to do, we will tell them what outcomes we expect them to achieve and then to demonstrate to our satisfaction that the process that they use to achieve that is appropriate and is based on sound science.

6:50

There are a number of different technologies, for example, that can be used with respect to air emissions, so scrubbers and the like that are in place. Rather than us prescribing what scrubbers need to be used, we would designate what the expectation is. Then, above and beyond that, we would take into account the fact that there's more than one approval that's in a particular airshed. If we're talking about air, for example, we would say that it's not enough that each of the individual approval holders achieves specific outcomes, but we have to collectively achieve outcomes within the airshed itself.

In the Industrial Heartland, for example, we've set some preliminary thresholds that say that notwithstanding the fact that every emitter is within their designated approvals, there comes a point in time where the airshed simply will not be able to sustain additional emissions. That means that we need to work among all of the approval holders to advance new technology and perhaps bring some of the existing emitters into a different standard before we will allow for additional new sources of emissions within that airshed.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Where could I find these expectations, as you're calling them? It's hard for me to keep you accountable if I don't know what it is you're supposed to be doing, so where would I find these expectations of things like air quality in the Heartland?

Mr. Renner: If you go to page 113 of our business plan, you'll see

there's some discussion there on cumulative effects management. A lot of the cumulative effects management is a work-in-progress, and it will hinge upon the application of the land-use framework and the work that comes. It's cross-ministry. It's involving Sustainable Resource Development as well as ourselves. Keep in mind, though, that when we talk about thresholds and we talk about the need to take into account cumulative effects, in virtually all cases there is sufficient room for short-term and medium-term expansion. It's the long term that we really need to be focused on.

Ms Blakeman: I appreciate that. Where would I find some numbers, something that I can say: "Okay. This is what the ministry said in April of 2010, and this is now December of 2013?" How do we hold you accountable for this? I've read this section many times. It sounds great, but I've got notes up and down the side: "What has been achieved? What does this mean?" So where would I find the numbers?

Mr. Renner: The numbers are under development. The numbers have not been developed.

Ms Blakeman: They were last year, too. So are they always under development, forever?

Mr. Renner: Well, we've got up in place now the specific numbers for the Industrial Heartland. We've developed that as a pilot project. So those numbers have been public knowledge for some time, both air and water within the Industrial Heartland.

Ms Blakeman: Where are they written down? If they're public knowledge, where could I find them?

Mr. Renner: I don't know that they're in the business plan, as such, but they would be on our website. If you go into the Alberta Environment website, under the Industrial Heartland air project, all of the numbers will be there.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Is that the only one that you have hard numbers for, thresholds or suggestions or whatever you call them?

Mr. Renner: Yes. We're in the process now of developing the same numbers for the lower Athabasca, which will be incorporated then into the lower Athabasca land-use framework.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. All right. Are there compliance and enforcement mechanisms in place for these thresholds, these numbers?

Mr. Renner: Well, all of the compliance and enforcement mechanisms now in place are under the present environmental regulatory system, which is based upon approvals. It's the input-based system. So every one of the emitters when we're talking air, for example, has requirements under its approval, and we hold them accountable for those.

Ms Blakeman: So for the new ones . . .

Mr. Renner: We have not implemented cumulative effects yet. So until cumulative effects comes in, individual approval holders are held accountable according to the very detailed approvals that they operate under.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So last year you didn't have cumulative

effects. This year you have one and more coming, we think. When will we have this in Alberta where we the public, me the opposition, the media can hold the department accountable by saying: "There is the number. Here is how you did. Here is where there was monitoring. Here is where there was compliance"?"

Mr. Renner: Well, you will always have access to specific numbers for air quality, for example, for emissions from specific approval holders.

Ms Blakeman: But you're talking about cumulative effects.

Mr. Renner: From a cumulative effects perspective this is a project that we are committed to, but it is a work-in-progress, and I can't give you a specific time. I would hope that we will have it in place within the next year to two years, but it is extremely complex. It's the first of its kind. We're inventing the wheel, so to speak. We can't go to other jurisdictions and see how they did it because they are looking to us.

Ms Blakeman: Fair enough, Mr. Minister, but it will now be potentially three years where there is no accountability from you on this process.

Mr. Renner: Well, the lower Athabasca: I mentioned that the numbers are under way. We should see the lower Athabasca land-use framework in place by December of 2010, but that will only be for one region. We've got seven more regions we need to get done.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. You understand the point I'm making, then. Okay. What line item does this appear under in your budget, the work that you're doing on cumulative effects?

Mr. Renner: It would be in a number of different line items, but primarily under environmental management.

Ms Blakeman: Vote number?

Mr. Renner: It's difficult to answer that question – I'm sorry – because there are aspects of cumulative effects that are within each of our divisions. So if you look on our financial statements, you'll see we have environmental assurance, environmental stewardship, and environmental management. Each of those plays a role in the development of the cumulative effects, so I can't point to a specific line item. It would be in all of the above, there would be aspects of it.

Ms Blakeman: I appreciate that, but again it's darn hard to hold you accountable when I ask, "Okay; this is the most important thing you're doing; it's your biggest project; where is it?" and I get an answer that, "It's, well, kind of everywhere." Can you break it out for me? Are you tracking it? Are you able to produce these numbers for me at some point in time, or is that just an impossibility?

Mr. Renner: If you look on page 174, environmental management, there are three votes there.

Ms Blakeman: There are six.

Mr. Renner: Well, three are worth noting because they have changes. So 3.0.1, environmental relationships, partnerships, and strategies, there is a \$1.1 million decrease due to a reduction in grant funding. We can get into that. But on 3.0.3 . . .

Ms Blakeman: Which is water for life.

Mr. Renner: Oh. It's on the next one. It's under 4.

Ms Blakeman: Which is environmental management, yes.

Mr. Renner: Item 4.0.1: there is a \$1.5 million budget increase to support cumulative effects management being implemented through regional plans developed under the land-use framework and support for the clean energy development.

Ms Blakeman: And that's an increase this year. Is it added to anything that was already there, or is that it?

Mr. Renner: There was work already under way last year. But our intention is to ramp it up this year, so it's an increase over last year's budget.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So there was some money under vote 4.0.1 that was cumulative effects management. You're not able to tell me that amount, but you can tell me you've added \$1.5 million to whatever that first unknown amount is?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Next.

Mr. Renner: Well, that's the one area where it's very specifically identified, but as I said, there would also be instances where we would be supporting cumulative effects in the other divisions as well.

7:00

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Are you able to tell me what the original amount was that you've now added or increased by 1.5?

Mr. Renner: Now, we don't operate our budget in that way.

Ms Blakeman: All right. Let me move on, then, because I don't think you can answer these questions.

Page 113 of the business plan. That's where you have your cumulative effects outline. The land-use framework and the cumulative effects are supposed to be the mechanisms for the implementation of your environmental strategies. How exactly is the cumulative effects management approach being integrated into the land-use framework?

Mr. Renner: Because it is a cross-ministry initiative, the land-use framework is being developed by Sustainable Resource Development, but the thresholds, the numbers that will be incorporated into the regional plans, will come from Alberta Environment. When we talk about air quality indexes, when we talk about water quality, in-stream flow needs in the lower Athabasca, for example, we will provide the advisory board with the appropriate numbers, and then they'll incorporate those into the regional plan.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm struggling with some of the same things I hear others struggling with, which is that they don't know. These committees that are working away don't know what these thresholds are. They don't know what cumulative effects management is, and they're all having a tough time trying to actually move this forward because nobody really knows. Based on the last 20 minutes of conversation with the minister, I'm beginning to understand their

frustration. Do you expect the implementation of the cumulative effects approach to be completed by 2012?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. That is the implementation for the land-use framework deadline as well?

Mr. Renner: Let me just clarify that I do expect cumulative effects to be in place by 2012, at least in some of the regions. Whether or not we're able to have the entire land-use framework complete and up and running by 2012 will depend upon a number of things, not the least of which is available funding to proceed to develop all of the plans in all of the regions. We have slowed up the development of the plans as a result of cost containment measures. For example, in this budget we're concentrating on the South Saskatchewan and the lower Athabasca. We have not begun the development of the plans in the other watershed regions.

Ms Blakeman: So, in essence, in the third year of work on this you will have accomplished two of seven or two of nine; I can't remember.

Mr. Renner: Seven.

Ms Blakeman: Seven. Okay. Then in the final year you're expecting to accomplish the final five?

Mr. Renner: No. That's why I said that we may not have them all completed by 2012.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, Lord. Okay. Is the minister satisfied with the timing and the progress on this?

Mr. Renner: Well, that's a question that is difficult to answer. Would I be happier if we had it all done? Of course I would. Am I dissatisfied because we don't? I don't think that that's a fair reflection either. I'm a pragmatist. I recognize that we can proceed and we can get some very valuable work done, but it needs to fall within our ability to do appropriate fiscal management. At this point in time our focus is on our core activities, on environmental protection. That enhancement will proceed but not at the same pace at which we might have been able to do had we been in a much stronger financial position and not had to incorporate some spending restraint so that we can send a whole lot of money over to Health.

Ms Blakeman: What I see is that this year you don't know or can't pull out how much you spent last year, but you're adding \$1.5 million to it. You don't know what the thresholds are. You might have some numbers that people could look at and hold you accountable for possibly for one project and hopefully for a second project by the end of the '10-11 fiscal year, which is three years into this project on the single most important way of managing the environment. There is no information here, there's no way to hold you accountable, and you're now telling me that you don't think you'll complete it by the target date that we were all told to expect things by. This isn't looking good.

Mr. Renner: Well, let's be clear. We will be held accountable in the interim in the same way that we have been held accountable up until now. We have the environmental protection act that is in place that is very, very specific and has served us extremely well. What we've begun is a process to evolve the existing legislation into

something new. That's not to suggest for a moment that what we have now is inadequate or is not protecting the environment. It's saying that we can do things better, that we're committed to doing things better. That's what cumulative effects are all about. But doing something better does not infer that what we're doing now is inadequate.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Determining the cumulative effects in a given region is dependent on – and you've already referenced it – certain scientific studies, and those studies always take time. How many of those land-use regional plans will actually incorporate your cumulative effects management information or thresholds by the time they come out the other end? It seems to me that the land-use framework has much more definitive timelines than what you're giving me. Is it possible that we're going to end up with land-use frameworks that are coming out without the cumulative effects thresholds in them?

Mr. Renner: No.

Ms Blakeman: They're going to have to wait for you, correct?

Mr. Renner: We will have the necessary studies and numbers available for the land-use framework committees as they move forward. The timing works the same, as I said. For the lower Athabasca the commitment is to have it in place by 2010. As a result, we will have those numbers to them well in advance of the time that they need to incorporate it into their plan.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Are there any mechanisms to stop development in given areas before the signs of environmental pressures start to emerge? In other words, are there any particular areas where the minister is encouraging a hands-off approach regarding development because it's been recognized that the ecosystem can't handle it?

Mr. Renner: No. I wouldn't say that that's the case. The reason that I say that is because, as I said in answer to one of your earlier questions, when we talk about establishing thresholds, any of the thresholds that have been examined are a long ways away from where we are right now, particularly with respect to air emissions, water quality, in-stream flow needs, and the like. So there is opportunity for additional development.

That being said, we have a very rigid process in place to deal with approval. Some of it is the responsibility of Alberta Environment, and some of it is the responsibility of other regulators. If it's an oil and gas development, for example, the ERCB is involved. If it's involving mining and some of the other operations, the NRCB gets involved. All of those various approval authorities along the way have an opportunity to either halt or amend or delay the development of new projects. It's based upon the nature of the application and whether or not the applicant is able to satisfy to the satisfaction of the regulator the necessary information that's required to ensure that we're not causing unnecessary and undue harm to the environment.

7:10

Just reminded by my deputy, I'll give you another example, and it's a good example. In the case of water allocation the South Saskatchewan River basin is closed. There are no new licences available anywhere in the South Saskatchewan River basin. There's a very good example of how the in-stream flow needs and the work that's been under way in the South Saskatchewan has determined that there are no further allocations available for water in the South Saskatchewan. We're now into a different world, where new

potential water users are required to find existing water users to share their water with them.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. What happened to special places? My memory was that even with the special places program, which doesn't seem to exist anymore, there was development allowed in those. There really doesn't seem to be any place where the province says: "Okay. This is just a sensitive ecosystem, and we're not going there. We're not going to even allow the applications." Based on what you just told me, this is an application-driven process. They put in the application, they start doing whatever, they can get right up to the chasm, at which point you say: "Stop. Whoa. That particular river system is so low right now that they're at a crisis, so we won't allow you to go any further." It does seem to be driven to the point of crisis before there's any sort of stop mechanism.

Mr. Renner: Well, let's be clear. It doesn't go to the point of crisis before decisions are made. The decisions are made to avoid going into crisis. In the South Saskatchewan the in-stream flow needs are largely being met. There are some pressures at certain times of the year and certain conditions of drought that need to be managed but no more than any other basin. Had we continued to issue licences without any restraint and restrictions, then it could be fairly said that we would have reached a crisis, but we did not and will not reach a crisis because we made a decision long in advance, long before it reached that stage.

Special places is something that is not under my jurisdiction. That is something that's the responsibility of SRD, but to the best of my knowledge the special places program is alive and well and operating. Each of the special places is operated on with rigid criteria on the type of development that can go on. If the proposed development would not be in accordance with the management plan for that particular area, they would not receive approval.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. On page 112 of your business plan under environmental policy and strategy co-ordination it talks about: "A coordinated approach to policy and strategy implementation is needed to address these challenges." What is the minister doing to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach between the ministries of Environment, Energy, SRD? Is there a performance or an outcome measure? Do you have timelines?

Mr. Renner: There is a formal process that has been established among the various ministries that we affectionately know as SREM. It's an acronym that I don't even remember what it stands for, but it is Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, Energy, and – what's the other one? – ERCB. At the officials level they work very, very closely together to co-ordinate activities as best they can.

That being said, there's very much a renewed commitment to move even more intently – I guess that is the right word – towards that co-ordinated approach that came out of the recent announcement on the competitiveness review, where effectively those same organizations have committed to very aggressively work to identify areas of duplication, areas of overlap, and to streamline our regulatory system. But let's not forget that at the end of the day the reason we have a regulatory system is to ensure that we (a) protect the resource, (b) protect the environment, and (c) protect the social values associated with the environment. All of those kinds of objectives need to be met. Streamlining is designed to assist the development, but it's certainly not designed to compromise the ability to protect the environment and protect all of the other things that each of those regulatory bodies is responsible for.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. How many Department of Environment employees are working on the land-use framework at this point in time?

Mr. Renner: About a hundred.

Ms Blakeman: Are you able to assign a cost factor to that or not?

Mr. Renner: Well, if you do some multiplication, I would guess it's about a hundred thousand dollars annual cost per employee, so it's about a million dollars.

Ms Blakeman: All right. Thank you.

What has the minister done to ensure that the environmental perspective has a high priority in the development of the land-use framework regional plans and that we're not dead last?

Mr. Renner: I'm sorry. Do you want to repeat that?

Ms Blakeman: What have you done to make sure that the environmental concerns, the environmental perspective, is a prominent one in these land-use framework regional plans?

Mr. Renner: Well, I think that comes partly through the interaction that we have with the boards that are developing the plans, partly through the cumulative effects management that we put in place, and partly through the reality that while SRD is leading this project, Environment has been very much involved and will continue to be involved as it evolves through the process. Remember that at the end of the day the regional plans, that are developed at the advisory level, are adopted by government and by cabinet, so there will be an opportunity every step along the way, including the final step, to ensure that we're comfortable that the environmental objectives have been met.

Notwithstanding that, the implementation of cumulative effects environmental management does not mean that Alberta Environment is no longer necessary. In fact, it will mean that we become all that much more critical in the ongoing process. We're just going to do business a little bit differently. We're going to be focused on outcomes. We're going to be holding industry accountable in ways like we've never been able to do before. Much of the reason for having the regional land-use framework put in place in the first place is to protect the environment. There are other issues around land planning and municipal growth and those kinds of things, but one of the primary purposes for developing the regional land plan is so that we can be assured that we're protecting the environment and that we're protecting the land base for future generations.

Ms Blakeman: That sounds great, Mr. Minister, but I do not have any reassurance at this point that the environmental perspective has any kind of weight in this debate. When I see a royalty structure which only consulted the oil and gas industry come forward with recommendations of environmental regulations that need to be changed but the environmental people weren't at the table, just the industry, I start going: whoa.

7:20

You know, from every question I've asked the minister about cumulative effects and the role, the priority, the power, the muscle, the veto power, anything that would reassure me that the land-use framework will not go forward without enough protection in there for the environment, that you guys are willing to sign off on it, I don't get the sense that there's any muscle to the environmental

perspective here. There's a lot of muscle to the energy perspective in this province. It drives a lot of our economy – fair enough – but I need you to punch above your weight level here.

Mr. Renner: The terms of reference that were developed when the land-use framework advisory board was put in place are very, very specific when it talks about the environmental issues that must be taken into account. It's a very detailed document. The one I'm referring to specifically is the one for the lower Athabasca.

Ms Blakeman: Are those the public ones?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: I don't remember it being incredibly detailed. I remember them being very vague.

Mr. Renner: It's fairly long. I'm guessing, but it's probably 12 pages or more long.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. In the lower Athabasca region, clearly, they're counting on significant industry growth. This is one of the few things that's actually listed in that land-use framework. I'm sorry. There's no point in my asking you that question. I'm just going to go on.

Are you aware of and what are you doing around activity that seems to be taking place in a race against those regional plans being established? You know, you've got some municipalities that seem to be trying to get ahead of those regional plans being implemented. We're seeing a lot of development at Sylvan Lake right now, for example. We've seen the Red Deer gravel developments around the Red Deer aquifers. It seems to me those are being hustled through. Those projects are being pushed to get in place before there is a land-use framework in place that would prevent that activity. You guys are going to have such a long list.

Mr. Renner: I can go ahead and answer that? Much of the question is probably better addressed to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who deals with the land planning issues.

Ms Blakeman: But these all have significant environmental effects.

Mr. Renner: Certainly, there's always overlap on either side, but I would suggest to you that rather than prejudging these as being a failure, you give it some time, that you note that these plans are in place. I would not necessarily accept as a fact that development is ongoing and rushing out there to get under the gun, so to speak, or under the deadline of these plans. Development does not proceed unless there is a market for it to succeed. I just would not accept your premise that the only reason these projects are going ahead now is so that they can beat the planning process. I'm not willing to accept that as a statement that is valid and true.

That being said, if there is an element associated with this development that requires environmental approvals, that requires any intervention on the part of Environment, then all of the existing safeguards that have been in place and will continue to be in place need to be adhered to. We're dealing with issues related to water use and water licensing. We're dealing with issues related to shoreline and development along the shoreline. All of that is the responsibility of Alberta Environment, and it will continue to be the responsibility of Alberta Environment even after those plans are in place.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. What is the ministry doing to ensure that municipalities are fully aware of the extent to which the regional land-use plans will affect them and their particular environmental policies that are already in place? Some of what I'm seeing is that the municipality currently has the power to approve certain things to go forward. It may not be in the best use of the environment, but that doesn't mean that you're going to get a piece of this. There doesn't seem to be any overriding strategy to look at this. Maybe the cumulative effects management strategy incorporated in the land-use framework will be able to address some of these issues, but for right now what are you doing to work with the municipalities around how these frameworks are going to affect them?

Mr. Renner: Well, again, I think those questions are probably best directed to either the Municipal Affairs ministry or the Sustainable Resource Development ministry. I think that it's no secret that we've made some tremendous progress in the case of the capital region, for example, in putting together a capital region plan that will constitute in a very significant way that portion of the regional plan that relates to the capital region. There are similar kinds of ongoing dialogue in the Calgary region with the Calgary Regional Partnership.

I think what the introduction of the land-use framework has accomplished is that it's brought all of these players together, recognizing that this is an opportunity for them to have some very meaningful and real input into what will become a long-term plan that will have an effect on them. I don't think there's a municipality anywhere in the province that's not aware of the need for them to become engaged and be part of the land-use framework planning process.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm going to move on to reclamation, then. What I would like to see is a government that cleans up Alberta's toxic tailings ponds through research partnerships, strict guidelines on enforcement, and shared best practices. Currently there are upwards of 40,000 sites that are not officially abandoned or in use, and there are clearly missing layers of legislation that ensure that this doesn't happen. We need something to ensure that reclamation takes place in a set amount of time. Why has the minister made the choice not to do this, not to follow through on reclamation legislation that would pick up the missing layers? It seems to me that there are a number of loopholes in what's going on here.

Mr. Renner: Well, I don't know that I would agree with that. It's abundantly clear that the responsibility for reclamation lies exclusively and only with the approval holder, so he who causes the disturbance is responsible for reclamation.

Ms Blakeman: True, but if they're not officially abandoned, they don't have to do anything. Then we end up with companies that go under. All kinds of things happen, and we end up with sites that do need to be looked at, and they aren't. It's a loophole.

Mr. Renner: I wouldn't share the term "loophole." Certainly, it is a point of some concern in some areas, particularly for landowners that are wanting to do development in other ways; in the case of an oil well, for example. As I have been told, one of the primary reasons why some of these sites are not fully abandoned is because there is emerging, new technology so that there are very real expectations that a nonproducing well could within a reasonably short period of time be reinvigorated, whether that be an oil well through technology like enhanced oil recovery with CO₂, or in the case of gas wells I'm told that there are new and emerging technolo-

gies that will also allow for further extraction and further development on gas wells.

7:30

That being said, I do understand that there is some frustration as it relates to the timing of the overall abandonment procedure and reclamation as it relates to wells. There are really two kinds of wells that we're dealing with. One is our wells that are under the care and control of existing companies, and one is wells that have been orphaned for whatever reason. You'll remember that the government made a very serious commitment to inject \$30 million into the orphan well fund. That significantly enhanced our ability to deal with some of these wells that did not have identifiable owners and clean up a significant number. Whether a firm deadline that says that at a certain point in time this well must be abandoned could actually be applied, I don't know. I don't think it's quite that simple. I don't think it's a black-and-white situation. It's like with so many things: there are always balances that need to be maintained.

Ms Blakeman: I'll keep going on reclamation. As of September '09 there was only one square kilometre of land that had been certified by the government as reclaimed. Has there been any improvement in this? What are your targets for reclamation and over what time period?

Mr. Renner: Well, the targets for reclamation – I'm assuming you're talking now about the oil sands – are 100 per cent. We don't have to have targets. There's a requirement that all of the disturbed land must be returned to an equivalent state.

Ms Blakeman: I appreciate that, but let's deal in reality here. We've got one square kilometre, and the oil sands have been in place for 50 years.

Mr. Renner: Well, the reality is that these are long-term projects. You can't begin reclamation until you see some mining activity.

Ms Blakeman: That would be another loophole.

Mr. Renner: So when mining activity has concluded, then you begin the reclamation. It's a long process. First, you need to fill in the hole. That is usually filled up by the sand that was removed, minus the oil. Then you have to replace the overburden, recontour the land. Then you begin the process of revegetating the land. It starts off with grasses and the like and moves into shrubs and trees. The reclamation is not complete until all of that vegetation has established itself. That takes a very long period of time. What we're in the process of moving towards is something that I would like to call progressive reclamation.

So when you point out that there's only a very small portion of land that has been reclaimed, you fail to recognize that there are thousands of square kilometres of land that are in the process of being reclaimed. It's hardly fair to say that there is no commitment on the part of industry to do reclamation, because there are many other sites that are at various stages.

Ms Blakeman: I didn't say that. I have not said that in the time we've been sitting here, so don't put words in my mouth.

Mr. Renner: What I think we need to introduce is a higher degree of transparency and a higher degree of understanding, and we are working with industry to do just that.

Ms Blakeman: How are you going to increase transparency?

Mr. Renner: By having an opportunity for access to the information, that is much needed in this discussion, that relates to the portion of the land that is at some point in time in the reclamation process. Right now the only land that anyone ever hears about is the land that has completed the full cycle. I think it's critical and important that people understand what the whole cycle is. There are some areas that are in active mining, but there are many more areas that have completed the active mining and are at various stages of reclamation. No one ever hears about those, and I'm bound and determined that they should, and they will.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. On page 180 of the estimates there is a line item for reclamation and emergency preparedness. The budget at this point is \$2.3 million. Are you able to tell me how much in total you put into orphan wells reclamation last year? How many orphan wells were you able to reclaim with this investment of taxpayer dollars? Is this the total budget for reclamation of orphan wells this year?

Mr. Renner: The entire orphan well program is not within Alberta Environment, so that does not refer to orphan wells. The orphan wells are funded through an independent third-party funding organization. Industry is required to contribute to it. I mentioned earlier that the government of Alberta . . .

Ms Blakeman: Okay. What is the reclamation portion of that amount of money, then?

Mr. Renner: The dollars that you referred to are almost a contingency fund. It's used, when required, to deal with instances like a sinkhole or something like that that should develop, unforeseen circumstances where we need to get in and do some work that's not attributable to industrial development. It's really a case where nature has caused something to happen.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. In December the Pembina Institute reported that only two companies will meet the requirements laid out in the ERCB directive 074 to reduce the tailings between 2011 and 2013. What is the minister doing to ensure that we have better compliance than a 22 per cent success rate?

Mr. Renner: Well, I'm not so sure that I agree with the assessment of the Pembina Institute. I think that we will have a much higher success rate than that.

The fact of the matter is that there are two sides that are associated with tailings management. One is on a go-forward basis applying appropriate rules to new development, that is much more practical to apply the latest technology. In fact, I think it's incumbent upon us and industry to use the best available technology on a go-forward basis.

For some of the existing operations you have to put a plan in place that recognizes that there are time frames associated with capital and recognize that you need to implement changes to an ongoing business in a time frame that is appropriate for what can be done. Keep in mind that those that are already operating there are operating under licences that they were granted for technology that was appropriate at the time. As those plants retire and move to new locations, they, too, will be required to adopt the same kind of standards and new technologies that are applied to newer operators.

Ms Blakeman: Well, two of them have met the requirements of

directive 074, and the other seven haven't, neither for fine particle capture nor for trafficability requirements. Are you contesting these results? Do you disagree with this?

Mr. Renner: I'm saying that there's a difference between new technology and existing technology. Call it what you will; call it grandfathering or whatever. It is much more difficult to change technology for existing operations than new. It has to be done in conjunction with appropriate timing.

Ms Blakeman: Are you trying to change directive 074, then?

Mr. Renner: No.

Ms Blakeman: Well, they haven't met it, and they're not likely to. What are you saying? That you want everything changed so that they'll meet it or that something will get better in the future?

Mr. Renner: First of all, let's be clear. Directive 074 is an ERCB directive, not an Alberta Environment directive. That being said, all I'm saying is that we need to be as aggressive as we can to ensure that we move this industry to the new technology. But you can't do it overnight, and you can't expect it to happen overnight. You have to have realistic time frames, and I think that we are moving in that direction.

7:40

Ms Blakeman: Does the ERCB directive 074 not have realistic time frames, asking for 20 per cent by June of 2011, 30 per cent by June of 2012, and 50 per cent by June of 2013? Is that not reasonable?

Mr. Renner: You'll have to ask them.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So the Minister of Environment is not concerned about failing to meet reclamation deadlines.

Mr. Renner: No. Let's not be putting words in my mouth.

Ms Blakeman: Well, fair is fair. You put them in mine.

Mr. Renner: I'm just saying that if you're not realistic, you can make all of the commitments in the world, but if you don't have an appropriate plan in place on how you're going to achieve those, you're bound to be disappointed at the end of the day. We work constantly with industry in seeking solutions and moving toward those targets. Those targets may well be met, but I'm not convinced that the timelines are appropriate. Whether it's 2012 or 2013, I guess time will tell.

Ms Blakeman: How do you make sure that industry does clean up its mess? What actual enforcement measurements are in place and are acted upon to ensure that the cost of reclamation does not become a provincial liability and doesn't flow back to the taxpayer?

Mr. Renner: It's part of their approval process, and it's also a mining security that is held by the province as a backstop mechanism.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Mr. Renner: They have very strict requirements for reclamation and not just at the end of the day but during the process as well. When they get their approval for a disturbance, that approval also includes requirements for ongoing reclamation.

Ms Blakeman: How many environmental enforcement officers are employed by the ministry, and how does this compare to numbers from the last five years?

Mr. Renner: Well, we've had no reductions in staff. In fact, we've probably had increases over the last five years.

Ms Blakeman: How many environmental enforcement officers do you have right now?

Mr. Renner: We don't have that number offhand.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. While you're looking, then, could you find out what the cost is and where this appears in your budget estimates, what line item this would appear in?

Mr. Renner: It would be part of environmental management under compliance.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So the vote number for that would be . . .

Mr. Renner: It would be under 4.0.3, compliance and enforcement.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes this portion of the meeting.

At the outset I mentioned that we would take a five-minute break. Some members have asked for 10 minutes, so if there is no opposition, I will declare a 10-minute break at this point.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I have an opposition because that's five minutes less time for us to be asking questions. If the others just want to stay out on a five-minute longer break, go for it, but we need that time to ask questions.

The Chair: Okay. I will declare a 10-minute break at this point. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Why are you doing that when this is scheduled time for us to question the minister? You've just taken away five minutes of our time. There is nothing in the standing orders that would allow you to do that. The break that is scheduled here is with the agreement and the co-operation of the people that are here.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: Just take your five minutes. Nobody's objecting to that.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go for five minutes. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 7:44 p.m. to 7:49 p.m.]

The Chair: We will call the meeting to order again, and we'll go directly to Mr. Anderson, please.

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: You'll be switching back and forth?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. You'll never guess what I want to talk about today, Minister.

Mr. Renner: Oh, I can probably guess.

Mr. Anderson: Global warming and climate change, different types of phraseology that we use to describe it. We're spending an awful lot of money: a hundred million on CCS, carbon capture and storage; \$64 million on the climate change initiatives, various climate change initiatives; et cetera. Within that context I'd like to speak with the minister. A couple of things I need to get to right off the bat. The first is cap and trade. The reason I need to understand that is because you have that \$15 per tonne carbon tax on industry. I think when I left, we were entertaining the idea with the feds of allowing Alberta industry to go outside of the province to buy credits for up to 30 per cent of their emissions offsets. Is that something that we are still entertaining, or are we dead set against money going outside of the province for this cap-and-trade idea?

Mr. Renner: We continue to hold very firm to our resolve that the tools that are employed to deal with climate change cannot be a one-size-fits-all and that what works in some jurisdictions will not work in others; their profile is significantly different. In the case of Alberta, for example, the majority of the emissions that we have are large central-point sources. We have the geology that allows us to employ technology. So we've been adamant in saying that the kind of mitigation tools that would be employed need to recognize the commitment that Alberta has for investment in technology. We have the technology fund. We have the system that's in place now. We've been arguing long and hard that whatever we end up doing on a Canadian or North American basis has to have some flexibility and has to recognize the need for equivalency for various regions.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. I would suggest, from the Albertans that I've talked to – and I think there is a large, large number that feel this way – that any money that's going to go outside the province to purchase emissions offsets in other jurisdictions is just simply totally unacceptable. I would say on behalf of those Albertans that if there's any entertainment that we are even thinking about going into such a scheme, I think there'll be a lot of people that would be against that. I hope that the minister would take that under advisement.

The next piece. I was looking at this article on carbon capture and storage. I have about 30 of these in my file on this subject, but in the most recent one, from March 13, there's a U of C study that's saying that in order to make carbon capture and storage a feasible initiative, carbon would have to be priced at somewhere in the range of \$50 to \$60, about three times the price that we've put on carbon today. That would translate into billions and billions of dollars of cost. That's a worry to me because I feel that that's going to be passed on to consumers, and it's going to be passed on to business and industry, and it's going to lose us jobs, and it's going to lose us progress. I mean, we're already one of the first jurisdictions, if not the first jurisdiction, to price carbon, which I think is a huge mistake in and of itself. Are you actually thinking about increasing the costs to industry from \$15 per tonne to higher?

Mr. Renner: Well, we've indicated that at \$15, we're \$15 higher than virtually everywhere else. There are starting to be some costs imposed. B.C. has now brought in a carbon levy that begins to approach the one that we have in Alberta. Other jurisdictions have begun a process. Saskatchewan is in the process of passing similar legislation to ours. But that being said, we felt that it's important – and I still honestly believe that it's important – that Alberta put in place a regulatory regime that serves our purpose, that allows us to have significant reductions in CO₂ but do so in a way that works for us.

7:55

The price of carbon is something that needs to be co-ordinated or needs to be set on at least a North American basis if not a global basis in order for there to be any opportunity for some of these kinds of regimes to ultimately be successful.

Mr. Anderson: But it's not set now. We're essentially setting our own price at \$15. I mean, the other provinces and the United States certainly haven't put a price on their carbon. There's some international trade. There are some trading markets out there. But we're out in front of this, which makes us less competitive than our neighbours again. I'm wondering what the justification is behind that, especially with the way that this debate is going in the United States, when it doesn't look like we're going to have some, you know, onerous measures put on our carbon.

Mr. Renner: Well, let's not forget that the \$15 price that we have here is \$15 by way of a compliance mechanism that's based upon not achieving a 12 per cent reduction in intensity. It's hardly \$15 a tonne, as some suggest that, perhaps, it should be right across the board from tonne 1. It only applies on the very largest emitters, 100,000 tonnes a year and up. There are about a hundred of those emitters in the province.

Again, we've indicated and been very consistent that we see this as an opportunity for Alberta to lead by example, to show that there are ways other than an unrestricted cap-and-trade system to achieve the targets of reducing CO₂. I guess at the end of the day the bottom line is that if you don't believe that CO₂ mitigation is something that is necessary or is appropriate, then you're never going to agree with any kind of mitigation system that's put in place.

Mr. Anderson: That's absolutely right.

Mr. Renner: So, you know, that may well be your opinion, and I know that that opinion is shared by many, but it is certainly not the prevailing opinion globally. It is not the position of the government of Canada, nor is it the position of the government of Alberta. The government of Alberta recognizes that climate change is real and that we have a responsibility to mitigate against the effects of climate change.

Mr. Anderson: Minister, you and I aren't scientists, you know, but I think we're both educated. We both read the papers. We both read books. We both do our research. Do you have anybody on your staff that gives you the other side of the coin on the climate change issue, or is it, basically, that you just feel 100 per cent that humans are causing catastrophic global warming?

Mr. Renner: We have experts that are on our staff. We have experts that we work with in our academic institutions. I feel confident that I have a well-rounded briefing that reflects both sides of this argument. You know, I'm not going to get into what I believe or what my colleagues believe. The fact of the matter, whether you like it or not, is that it is the government of Alberta policy. I am the Minister of Environment for the government of Alberta. Our policy is to develop a regulatory regime that is aimed towards eventually curbing the increase in CO₂ and in the long term dramatically reducing the amount of CO₂ that is emitted as a result of industrial and human activity in Alberta.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that's clear. You know, I don't expect you to get into what your colleagues believe or don't believe. But it is very

important, since we're spending hundreds of millions – well, billions – of dollars on this initiative that, man, we get our facts straight. I'm not convinced that you're receiving a well-rounded, even-keel evaluation on this issue. So I want to in that context justify this amount of money that we're spending. I'm going to share some things from the last month to two months that have occurred globally on this issue and ask you if you have heard or if you've been briefed on any of these issues, and I think that that's a fair question to ask.

Obviously, I do think that the science on global warming is settled on several points. I believe that the science is settled very clearly that humans are increasing CO₂ levels in the atmosphere. I think that's very clear. We know that CO₂ is a greenhouse gas – that's clear – a trace gas but a greenhouse gas nonetheless. We know that the Earth has warmed over the last 100 years. That's settled for sure. However, there is a huge degree of uncertainty – a huge degree of uncertainty – as to the extent to which man-made CO₂ emissions are affecting the environment. There can be no doubt about that. I mean, not even David Suzuki would dispute it. There is a great disparity on the degree to which the globe is warming.

I look at these things and say: you know, look at the climategate e-mails that just came out. You have manipulated results. You have data loss. You have manipulation of the peer review process, manipulation of the data to hide the medieval warming period somehow. That's kind of a hard thing to hide, but they were trying and failed. You have Phil Jones, who was at the very centre of that scandal, one of the most quoted scientists in the IPCC reports, coming out on the BBC not more than a month ago – this is the head of the department that's at the centre of this scandal – and saying: not only is the science unsettled; we haven't warmed since 1998. We haven't even warmed. That warming is not accounted for by their climate models. I mean, these are not my words. This is well documented.

You have NASA going back and admitting that they have to redo all their records because they were not including dozens of weather stations from cold areas like Canada and Russia. Now they have to go back and redo on climate. Because of that, they've had to revise their figure that the coldest year on record was 1998. They had to revise that, and they came out that it was 1934 after they did some of the revisions. So you've got that problem. You have Richard Lindzen from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the head climatologist at that prestigious university, coming out and saying that the IPCC report was misinterpreted, that the summary of policymakers is completely out of line with what the scientists are saying. The science is not settled in any way, and we haven't warmed since 1998, clearly.

You know, I've got about eight of these books. Now we have Ian Plimer, one of the leading scientists in Australia, coming out with his book *Heaven and Earth: Global Warming, The Missing Science*. It's a very thick read, but it's well worth the read because it goes in detail through the proofs. I mean, it just takes you through the whole history of the Earth, frankly, and shows that we're not out of the ordinary whatsoever in the warming that we're experiencing right now.

I could go on and on and on, and I'd love to, but I only have 20 minutes. I will say one thing, of course, one last thing that you must know. The United Nations now has a public inquiry into the International Panel on Climate Change as well as the head of that, their leader, Rajendra Pachauri, investigating why the IPCC reports have so many scientific inaccuracies in them. How did it happen? How is that the Mann graph, the hockey stick graph that was so prominent in Al Gore's movie, is totally fraudulent? I mean, no one disputes that. It's been removed since then from the IPCC reports. You have the glacier-melting debacle that wasn't happening. The

Himalayas are not going to be melted by 2050 or whatever their claim was. The same with the rainforests: untrue.

I guess my point, Minister, is: how can you go along continually piping, continually towing the alarmist viewpoint on this when, frankly, the science is definitely settled? It's settled that it's unsettled. Scientists don't think it's settled. There's tons of research to be done, which is why we're spending billions of dollars worldwide on trying to figure this puzzle out. There are so many variables that we don't understand. Does that even cross your desk? Does that information cross your desk? Who are these scientists that are telling you that there's still a consensus? It's just not true. Who are the experts that are saying that there's a consensus out there as to the extent of man-made global warming?

8:05

Mr. Renner: I don't recall ever saying that there is a consensus. I've made the statement before – and I'll repeat it again – that there continues to be overwhelming evidence that climate change is the result of human activity.

Mr. Anderson: What's the evidence, then? Share it with me.

Mr. Renner: We're not here to debate the issue of climate change. I'm just telling you that it's pretty clear that we have an issue we need to deal with.

That being said, Alberta, as you well know, has been roundly criticized by many in the environmental community for not taking this issue seriously enough. We have been pragmatic since day one, saying that we're not going to promise things that we can't deliver, that we're not going to commit ourselves to do things that will destroy our economy.

At the same time, we are also not prepared to ignore what is an issue that globally needs to be dealt with. The timelines that we have in our climate change plan I think are realistic, but at the end of the day, you know, I think there will always be some debate when it comes to the kind of science that we're talking about, and we probably won't know the true impact, the true result of human-induced climate change until about a hundred years from now. Frankly . . .

Mr. Anderson: You're saying that it isn't settled, then. Is that what you just said, that we won't know for a hundred years whether it's true or not?

Mr. Renner: We won't have the proof. But what I was going to say before I was interrupted was that I'll sleep a lot better in my grave if I know that we acted now as opposed to doing nothing if that proof should happen to be that it was real, it needed to be acted upon, we chose to ignore it, and the subsequent generations are reaping the results.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. I mean, you're talking about the precautionary principle, and I understand that fully. I have four kids. I care about their future as much as or more than anyone here cares about any child's future. I don't think we need to go into that avenue of thought. I am also concerned about the type of economy that they're going to inherit and the amount of taxes they're going to have to pay if we continue to put good money in after bad on this issue.

Is there any thought to sponsoring a forum or something where you can have scientists come in and debate this issue? I mean, you obviously don't want to debate this issue, and that's fine. I understand that. We were joking earlier, you know, with one of the members of the opposition that, oh, you know, this is like the Flat

Earth Society stuff. Well, with all due respect, it's not. This is very unsettled science. World opinion is very divided. Scientific opinion is very divided. It's not as you say, Minister. I don't understand how you can say that it's the overwhelming, prevailing viewpoint. Certainly, it is politically but not scientifically. I guess I would say: why don't we have a forum or something . . .

The Chair: Thank you. That concludes this portion of the meeting. Our next speaker is Ms Notley, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Okay. Many things to go through. I can't help it. I'm sorry. I've just got to get in on this one. You know, the argument that seems to be going forward, of course, is this whole issue of consensus. I just want to remind people right now that there are still scientists out there with relationships with the tobacco companies who will argue that there is no consensus on whether tobacco causes cancer. The fact of the matter is that if you look at the history of scientific development on major causative environmental issues that have major financial implications, this is what happens. Strategy two is always: if you can't beat them on the evidence, then create uncertainty. That's the just way it is.

Nonetheless, let's move on from that. I just want to start by saying that I know that the minister is very keen on all the stuff in his ministry, but because I only have 20 minutes, I'm going to try to jump around a bit. So there may be a point when I interrupt you, but it's not because I'm trying to be disrespectful, unless it sounds like I am, but that will be clear. More often than not, it may just be that I'm trying to move on to another topic.

Mr. Renner: Remind me how long-winded I am.

Ms Notley: Well, it's more that I'm just trying to move on to another topic. I'll sort of say something like "Thanks; that's great" so that I'm not actually being dismissive. Okay.

You get one freebie because I'm going to start with a bit of a freebie here. I'm noting as a starting point the difference in your mandate from this year to last year. You know, last year you were talking about environmentally sustainable resource development, climate change strategy, the cumulative effects management framework, and now we've got this thing – I'm shocked to see this as your mandate – that it is your job to enhance the province's competitiveness to attract new investment. I really have to say that I think that ought to be nowhere near your ministry's objective. We have ministries that deal with that. Your job is protect the environment, so I'm a little concerned about that.

Having said that, I want to move quickly into the issues of cumulative effects management. There were a few things that were said that, I have to say, concern me a little bit. Perhaps part of this is my fault. In my experience, you know, I'm very aware of what the concept of cumulative effects is, and in general what that means is that the sum of two items is much greater than its parts. That typically means, then, that whatever thresholds you have identified for a particular toxic item must be dropped in order to recognize that the sum of two parts is – you know what I mean. That's always been what I've thought about with respect to cumulative effects management. I've always heard you talk about it, and I've always thought that that's a really good thing.

But now what I'm hearing about is outcome-based objectives within the context of cumulative effects management. Perhaps I'm mishearing what's going on, but what I think I'm starting to hear is actually a move away from the standard process of saying: "Person A, you can only allow five parts per million of toxic substance B to ever get into the water system. If the next person over you is doing it, too – the starting point is that you never ever go above that five

parts per million. We will always monitor you for that, and we will always enforce that."

Then my thought had always been that once you get cumulative effects in place, what's going to have to happen is that that five parts per million will have to drop to two, not only because of the growing number of people coming in and the overall impact on the region but also because of the combined impact of various and sundry toxins.

Then I hear you saying, though, that the primary enforcement mechanism seems to be limited to where it would impact only whether you allowed new development. It seems to me that what you're going to need to do as you start to do this is that you're going to have to revise downward what you've already allowed. To assume that you have greater room right now to allow for more development under a certain ceiling negates the fact that every time you add one new thing to the mix, you have to re-evaluate whether your standards for that one thing and all the extra ones need to change because there's the combined impact of these things.

I'm really very worried that what we're doing is moving away from regular limitations on what should be in place and the reporting of them and then as well this whole notion of sort of working on it collaboratively. Well, God help us because everything we've seen in this ministry in terms of that has resulted in nothing actually ever happening.

That's my rant, and it's not terribly precise because it's late, but if you could maybe spend just, you know, two or three or four minutes telling me how you see that relating to the need to engage in ongoing enforcement and whether or not you believe it's correct that you ought to be reducing your thresholds in almost every case as a result of cumulative effects management.

8:15

Mr. Renner: Well, I think you're mostly correct in your interpretation of what cumulative effects management is about. I will accept that I didn't mention in my response earlier – but it is critical to this whole process, and you've brought it up – that cumulative effects management doesn't remove the requirement to have individual approvals on various emitters. We have something called BATEA, best available technology. We've talked about that before. What cumulative effects would say is that new players come into the field using BATEA. There's no compromising there. We determine through various and sundry ways what is the best available technology and what are the emissions that would be associated with that. That's the initial approval that would apply to anyone that comes in.

As we add additional players into the system, we start to approach the threshold. I'm talking air, for example. If we're talking about air quality, as new players come in, we're starting to have more load put on the air. What cumulative effects does is it then goes back and starts to assess all of the existing players, where, when they opened up, BATEA was different. Then you start to ratchet down some of those existing players so that you can accommodate additional new ones into the same airshed. If you can't ratchet down the existing players, if you can't change the technology for an existing plant in a time frame that's appropriate, that's the point at which you say: I'm sorry; we can't let anybody new into this airshed until we change the technology for some of the existing players. Or some of the existing plants may have outlived their useful life, and they're just shut down, and that, then, frees up some additional space.

That's where cumulative effects differs from something that we have right now. Now we're focused very much on the inputs, very much on saying: you will use BATEA, and this is how it will operate, but once you're there, you're good to go. In the future we're going to have to be constantly looking ahead and back at the same time and ensuring that we're bringing some of the existing

plants up to standard at the same time as new ones are coming in. That's the critical part of BATEA and how you manage that.

Ms Notley: Okay. So, then, we're basically back to the same point. That's the important thing, of course, not just looking forward but looking back. I could see where you're nowhere near your threshold but you're already at the point where you need to be dropping it down because of the combination of the two, air quality being a perfect example, right? You put two things together, and they're relatively benign at relatively moderate levels independently, but suddenly those factors are together, and it mixes into everything else or whatever, and then everything has to drop down because when you put them together, they just need to go down. I just want to sort of mirror my concern about the fact that we're not moving towards any kind of specificity in all of this very fast. But perhaps I misunderstood.

There's so much talk about moving away from sort of the approval process and moving, then, to monitoring. That was something, for instance, that was actually identified in the throne speech. I remember sitting in for the throne speech and underlining this, thinking that, well, this is ridiculous. How can we possibly amend downwards our approval process when we clearly don't have any kind of comprehensive monitoring process in place? So for some of the stuff that you were talking about there, I was concerned and probably still am a little bit. But I need to go on to a few other questions.

Really quickly, the October '09 Auditor General's report talked about having the Department of Environment implement a system for obtaining sufficient financial security with respect to conservation and reclamation activities. I know we've talked about both those things, but I don't know if we talked about the security and the follow-up on the AG's recommendations. Where are you on that?

Mr. Renner: We're probably 90 per cent complete. We've been engaged in ongoing discussions on how we can change the way we deal with security to ensure that that protection is there. Hopefully, within the next few months we'll be able to come forward with the details on that. We accepted that recommendation, and we're committed to move forward on that.

Ms Notley: Okay. I just have to jump in really quickly on a previous discussion around the ERCB regulations. I couldn't help because, of course, there was such reliance on the ERCB regs vis-à-vis the directives and the tailings ponds. I just have to quote back to you from *Hansard* from last year: "We've issued directives, that will be enforced, that will require significant reductions in the use of tailings ponds and eventually will lead to their elimination." I am concerned about the fact that the companies have now filed these reports which essentially say that they're not going to meet the standards fast enough. I mean, we've waited 40 years. My question, really, becomes: at what point do you start looking at enforcement mechanisms or penalties or something to make any of this real?

Mr. Renner: The enforcement provisions of the legislation come into place when a company (a) doesn't submit an appropriate plan or (b) doesn't follow the plan that has been approved.

Ms Notley: I think there were certain minimum requirements for what was supposed to be in the plan that they haven't done.

Mr. Renner: There's always a degree of room to negotiate specific timing. I talked earlier that oftentimes there are issues related to capital turnover. A company comes to us and says: "The require-

ment is for us to reduce emissions to level X. We want you to know that we're planning a major shutdown, overhaul, and we'll be investing in substantially new capital in two years. Can we have a one-year extension on this new approval so that we can do everything all at once?" Oftentimes we would work with them.

Ms Notley: But I believe some of them were looking at about 20 or 30 years.

Mr. Renner: Well, that simply won't be the case. I can assure you of that.

Ms Notley: Well, that goes back to the transparency because if that won't be the case, we need to know how and when and in exactly what capacity it will be determined that that won't be the case if that's all that's on the public record right now. But that's just a future thing. I need to jump to another question quickly.

Last year in estimates we talked briefly about community-based monitoring in Fort Chip, and you'd said at the time that you were very close to having a final model up and running. I'm just wondering where that's at and what the feedback has been.

Mr. Renner: We're having difficulty getting the community-based monitoring model up and running because we're having some issues related to defining what the purpose of the monitoring would be, whether or not the community and Alberta Environment agree upon what is the appropriate role for that community-based monitoring. The last time I was up in Fort Chip, I think that we made some progress, but it is extremely slow, and I guess that in some ways it's the nature of doing business. I won't deny the fact that I'm disappointed that we don't have it up and running. It's not for lack of trying. We've had staff that have been committed to it in a very significant way. I've been personally involved. But we haven't been able to reach an agreement on what that community-based monitoring is going to be. If you don't have the involvement of the community, you don't have community-based monitoring, and at this point in time the community and the department have not agreed upon what that is going to look like.

8:25

Ms Notley: I don't want to take up the whole time, but I'm wondering if, in a written response, I could get from you a delineation of the areas that remain subject to dispute in terms of reaching that agreement, you know, as neutrally as you can. I would just like to get more information on that, and I don't want to lose the last three minutes of time.

Mr. Renner: We can probably find some general information for you.

Ms Notley: Okay. Wetlands policy. We've been talking about trying to finalize and implement the new wetlands policy. We don't have it yet. Last week Canadian Press published a story reporting that the Alberta Chamber of Resources has announced that the provincial government – well, they basically started talking about the policy and saying that the government has accepted three of its four recommendations, including dropping a proposed no net-loss policy for wetlands and making wetlands reclamation discretionary instead of mandatory. I'm wondering if you can fill us in on whether any of that is accurate, what's up with this, and when we can expect to see the final policy.

Mr. Renner: Well, what is accurate is that we have had ongoing

discussions with industry. We've also had ongoing discussions with a number of other stakeholders as well. What is inaccurate about that statement is that Alberta Environment has agreed or disagreed with the position that has been brought forward. Decisions have not yet been made, so it's quite presumptuous on their part to try to predict what our final decision is going to be. That's just a fact. That's the way it is. In fact, I understand that they've even backtracked a little on that statement subsequent to that story.

Ms Notley: When will we get that?

Mr. Renner: We are in final stages. I know I say that a lot, but these are very, very complex kinds of issues to deal with. We are in the final stages of the development of a wetlands policy that would apply across the province. The white zone already has an interim policy in place. It's 20 years old, but it's an interim policy. It serves the needs in southern Alberta very well because we're dealing with an area where there's been substantial degradation of wetlands. It doesn't apply in the green zone. It doesn't apply, therefore, in northern Alberta, but the circumstances are entirely different. Yes, there is pressure on wetlands, and we need to deal with the pressure on wetlands, but the amount of wetlands is dramatically different than what we have in southern Alberta.

We're really looking to find a policy that would apply province-wide and would create a way for us to establish a value on wetlands and recognize that not all wetlands have exactly equal value. A wetland in southern Alberta that's maybe the last of its kind has substantially more environmental value than a wetland in northern Alberta that is, you know, one acre in 40,000. We need to protect all wetlands but maybe not necessarily all to the same degree, and that's where we're working on it.

Ms Notley: We need to protect them, but maybe not some as much?

Mr. Renner: Well, I'll give you an example. In southern Alberta we have a 3 to 1 policy in place. If it's unavoidable to protect the wetland, then the process calls upon a replacement of that wetland at a 3 to 1 rate because we recognize that we need to restore wetlands in southern Alberta. In northern Alberta we need to protect wetlands, so it may not be that same kind of 3 to 1 rate that would apply in the case in northern Alberta. Nevertheless, there needs to be some acknowledgement that wetlands have value and that we can't be indiscriminate in destroying them.

Ms Notley: Shifting gears really quickly to monitoring. We talked, of course, about monitoring opposed to responding to complaints, sort of spot-check monitoring, which you've referred to in the House.

The Chair: Sorry; that concludes this portion of the meeting.

Mr. George VanderBurg, the next speaker.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, interesting discussion.

I have two topics that I want to cover: one, the recycling program, and then two, a little bit on the oil sands. I'll start with the beverage container program. With the addition of the milk containers, have we seen success in that program?

Mr. Renner: Initial response seems to indicate the answer is yes, particularly on the plastics side. We still have, I think, some additional room for improvement on the milk containers that are in the – I forget what the terminology is, but it's the cardboard containers. I think that there still is a need for some additional

awareness that deposits are accruing on those containers, but we have seen a substantial increase in the volumes. I think all accounts would indicate that the transition of milk into the program has been a success.

Mr. VanderBurg: I did take some criticism from the municipalities in my riding, you know, when we went from the voluntary program to the refundable solution and still comments from municipal leaders that there are other products that should be added into our refundable program. You know, there are lots of drink containers that you can buy in a convenience store that still get pitched. Is the department considering any additions in this business cycle to that program?

Mr. Renner: Virtually every beverage container that you can buy in Alberta is covered by the program. Even those little pouches that don't look like a container have a deposit on them. I think that, again, gets back to the awareness. I think there are some people that are, to use your words, pitching them, but they're throwing away a dime every time they do. There is not a beverage container that's sold anywhere in the province of Alberta that does not have a 10-cent deposit on it.

Mr. VanderBurg: Including the milk drinks?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay. Fair enough.

On the tire recycling program. We've done a great job in the province with the smaller tires. It seems to be that when I hit the landfills and the holding areas in my constituency, there are still larger tires and more of the industrial-type tires. What's the plan there? Is there a process to work with the industrial base and take care of those large tires?

Mr. Renner: Well, every tire is recycled, but every tire doesn't necessarily carry the proportionate recycling fee. That's something that the tire board has been struggling with, having a look at whether or not there is a need for them to have a restructuring of the recycling fee that's on tires. The \$4 recycling fee on passenger tires is more than adequate and, in fact, as you know, is basically enabling the system to operate the way that it does, but it costs more than \$4 to recycle some of the larger tires. Up until now there's been a fairly significant surplus in the fund that has been used to bring more and more of the industrial-type tires into the system, but I think there will come a point in time when we have to seriously look at applying appropriate charges to those industrial tires so that the cost of recycling those tires is more adequately reflected in the tire board and the operational costs that they incur.

Mr. VanderBurg: So they are gathering the large tractor tires and industrial tires out in the sites?

Mr. Renner: They are.

Mr. VanderBurg: Okay.

On the electronic recycling: still piles and piles of computers at sites. What are we doing to get rid of those?

Mr. Renner: Well, I think that if you check more recently, those piles have dramatically reduced in size because the city of Edmonton recycling centre recently came online. They're processing a lot of those accumulated piles and making quite a difference. I think that there is still some opportunity for us to enhance the electronic

recycling program, particularly in some of the communities where it's not so much a case of a pile that gets higher; it's a case of providing for a convenient and appropriate location for people to drop those things off. In many cases it's almost like, you know, the roundup for spent drugs. You get one day a year to do it.

8:35

I know that even in my own community one of the service clubs held an electronic roundup day in the parking lot at the Wal-Mart. They filled up trailer loads. They ended up having a big panic halfway through the day, ordering additional trailers in to haul all this stuff away. There's a huge pent-up demand, and we need to find a way to get that demand met and get those products off to an appropriate recycling facility.

Mr. VanderBurg: Have we done any analysis to see the energy used to collect and recycle versus the energy and the materials that we're actually getting out of these goods? Like, are we spending more time and energy and product picking these items up, collecting them, getting them to a market? Have we done a full life cycle on what we're doing here?

Mr. Renner: I don't know if we have a full life-cycle analysis, but recycling has much more purpose than simply reusing. It's, you know, the three Rs. It's the reducing side, keeping them out of our landfills. That was the primary motivation originally when we put tires into a program. It wasn't because we wanted to recycle them as much as we wanted to avoid the environmental hazard that they were becoming both from a tire fire perspective – and you remember the issues that we had around that – and also the problems that tires and other kinds of material will cause if they end up in a landfill.

I think it's incumbent upon us to have these kinds of programs in place even if the numbers don't add up. That's why there is a recycling fee that's associated with electronics. It's not a deposit. You don't get your money back. It's a fee. It's an upfront fee, and that fee covers the cost of the recycling. The primary reason, apart from the fact that there are some useful end markets for that material, the main reason we do it is to keep the contamination out of our landfills.

Mr. VanderBurg: We'll move over to the oil sands. I've had the opportunity both here at work and personally to visit Fort McMurray many times. I think more Albertans need to go and actually see the massive amount of work that's being done and just the size of the project. It's huge.

You know, I've read that the oil sands account for 5 per cent or less of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions and a fraction of 1 per cent of the world's total emissions. How do you put that into perspective and compare this to other industries? How do we tell our neighbours that seem to be so fixed on ducks or tailings ponds? We can't seem to win that battle, but when you talk about the bigger picture, you know, what's your advice that you can give guys like me that travel around and talk about the oil sands projects?

Mr. Renner: Well, first of all, I think we all need to understand that we're never going to win in a debate over competing facts. Your facts are going to be held in a different light than the preconceived notion that others have. So doing it publicly, you know, from a public relations perspective, is probably not the route that we need to be going.

You're absolutely right. To put the whole issue of CO₂, for example, into perspective, you talked about the 5 per cent. You would think from all of the attention that oil sands get that they must

be the largest emitter of CO₂ in the province, but the fact of the matter is that they're not. They're not even number 2 or number 3; in fact, they're number 4. The largest source of emissions is the broader oil and gas industry generally, coal-fired electric generation, industrial. Then that's followed by oil sands.

That being said, though, you know, that doesn't deal with the issue that we're all dealing with when the eyes of the world are focused squarely on Alberta. I think it's important that all Albertans have a good understanding of what the facts are with respect to oil sands, not only what the facts are with respect to the regulatory regime that's in place today, the amount of regulation that that industry is under, but also the new technology that is being employed on almost a daily basis.

When I look at some of the leading-edge research that's under way at both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta and the commitment that the government has put into those institutions – for example, we just invested \$25 million from the Ecotrust fund that I referred to earlier into the Helmholtz research institute, which is a world-renowned institute out of Germany that has for the first time in their history established a formal partnership with another institution outside of Germany here in Edmonton at the University of Alberta that is committed to research that will lead to the reduction of the environmental footprint of oil sands.

We just put \$7 million into a research facility at the University of Calgary that is focused on in situ, not the mining side but the in situ side. Not only is it realistic to talk about in situ extraction of bitumen, but now the technology is very quickly leading to the fact that not only will there be in situ resource development, but there'll be also in situ refining taking place so that instead of bringing bitumen out of the ground, you're going to be bringing out of the ground a refined product, substantially reducing CO₂. For example, the numbers are of a magnitude as high as 80 per cent lower CO₂ emissions. When you consider that the techniques that they use don't need to use as much steam, they don't need to have the additional emissions that are generated by a refinery, the magnitude of the impact is tremendous.

Those are the kinds of things that we need to talk about, but we also have to ensure that we have those new technologies employed and in the field as quickly as possible.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, I think all Albertans, before they speak up and talk about the oil sands projects, should go and have a look. I've had a chance to go and see Devon's in situ project. I think their processes and their technology are going to take us into a whole new era of oil sands development. Can you tell me: what are the opportunities in in situ in the province in total? How many barrels do we have an opportunity to pull out of the ground through the in situ process compared to that of the open mining process? The footprint is minimal, and, like you say, the technology is going at a very, very fast pace.

8:45

Mr. Renner: Well, I think Energy could probably give you a better idea on the total number of barrels. The number that has been touted is with current technology about 175 billion barrels. But the important statistic that I think Albertans should be aware of when we talk with others about the oil sands is that approximately 80 per cent of that resource is not accessible through mining operations. With all of the attention that's paid to mines – and no one is denying that the mining operation has a substantial impact, albeit temporary; we are committed to reclamation – fully 80 per cent of the resource is in situ, so the future of the oil sands really is on the in situ side.

Mr. VanderBurg: Earlier we talked about the reclamation standards for land that is currently being used for the oil sands development. Again, seeing is believing. You know, when you stand on a site that's, I guess, in your words, partially reclaimed, there are buffalo roaming on it and grass growing and a huge, huge lake where the water seems to be pretty pure, but I guess it's in those different stages. How do we get Albertans to understand that massive amounts of reclamation have occurred? There are animals roaming there and trees growing, and that was an area of open pit mining at one time.

Mr. Renner: Well, I think there are two aspects. I talked earlier about progressive reclamation and additional transparency, but you don't have transparency if people don't have access to the information. The other side of that is that we're in the process now of developing a web-based portal that will give people access to that information, graphically or with an appropriate way of presenting data.

We need to be able to demonstrate clearly to anyone who doesn't have the opportunity to see it for themselves the proportion of land that is – we call it disturbed – under disturbance and then the subportions of that that are at various stages of reclamation. There is land that is disturbed, that is in active mining, but that is really the shortest portion of the time when there is an impact on that land. By far the longest time and some of the largest expenses, by the way, for industry are in recontouring that land, creating a terrain that is conducive to that revegetation. You can't just build a pool table. Every time it snows or it rains, you create floods. You have to recontour it. You have to re-create the hills, the valleys, the dips so that eventually you have a finished product that is roughly equivalent to what you started with in the first place.

I think that once we get this graphic representation up and running so that people will be able to see for themselves the amount of land that is cleared awaiting mining, the amount of land that's under active mining, and the amount of land that is at various stages of reclamation, they'll be much more comfortable that we're holding industry's feet to the fire and that we're ensuring that they are upholding their end of this bargain, which also includes reclamation.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. That concludes that portion.

We will return to Ms Blakeman, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. The strategic plan for reclamation of minable oil sands is a cross-ministry project, and it was supposed to have been released in November according to the correspondence we've had. We've now been told that the report exists. It's still to be approved by the minister. It's there. It just has to be reviewed, approved, and announced. When could we expect this? It's now been sitting on your desk since November.

Mr. Renner: Well, I think that it's a bit of a misrepresentation to say that it's sitting on my desk. There are still some refinements that are under way. We've had discussion at the executive committee level on that whole issue, but it is not complete. However, it should be complete within months.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Could you narrow that a bit, this being the middle of March, or tell me what the problem is?

Mr. Renner: Well, there's not a problem. It's a case of process. I am not the final decision-maker. I belong to a caucus, as do you. I am about ready to take that to caucus, and then there will be an appropriate amount of input and time involved in our internal

approval process. Once I've had cabinet and caucus approval, then it becomes official government policy.

Ms Blakeman: So before summer?

Mr. Renner: It should be.

Ms Blakeman: Good. Thank you.

On page 113 of the business plan under evolving climate change policy it says – well, clearly you're expecting it to evolve. What kind of changes are you anticipating? Do you think this will be in the form of new legislation or amendments to existing legislation?

Mr. Renner: I would have probably been able to give you a better or at least a different answer to that question in December, prior to Copenhagen and prior to the gridlock that has developed in Washington over the whole issue of climate change and climate change mitigation legislation. At this point there are a number of different theories on where we're going to go, but Alberta believes, as does Canada, that in the absence of action and some degree of continuity between the U.S. and Canada, we should not be proceeding in much more of an aggressive way than we already are. It will severely jeopardize our opportunities for economic growth, and it will do nothing to deal with the issue of climate change.

If you think that there is a lot of raw bitumen that is being exported to the U.S. and refined down there, just think how much additional refining would be going on in the U.S. if there were no CO₂ mitigation costs associated with any of the emissions in the U.S. It's critical that we have a policy in place that is applicable and equivalent on both sides of the border so that we don't drive away the emissions to other locations.

Ms Blakeman: Got you. So not sounding like we're going to get legislation or changes. Are we going to get the energy efficiency legislation I've been hoping for?

Mr. Renner: I think that we've come to the conclusion that much of what we need to do under energy efficiency can be implemented under existing legislation, so a new act is probably not necessary. We've got the emissions management legislation in place, that has a high degree of flexibility, large opportunities or many opportunities for a variety of regulations. We'll probably explore opportunities for moving forward on the efficiency side under the existing legislation, at least initially, and then if we find that it's necessary to expand beyond that, there may be a need for us to supplement that with additional legislation.

8:55

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

Under strategic priority 5 you're talking about working with the other ministries in implementing "integrated and accessible environmental information systems critical to achieving Alberta's goals for the environment." What will be the cost for the organization, implementation, and management of this information system? Do you have it under a particular line item?

Mr. Renner: We wouldn't have that in this current-year business plan. What we're talking about is something that would be the development of the same for implementation in subsequent years.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. It says, "develop and implement." Really, you just mean develop but not implement at this point.

Mr. Renner: Well, remember, this is a three-year business plan.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Are you able to tell me when you expect it would be implemented if this is year 1? Would you have it implemented by year 3?

Mr. Renner: We're well along the way, particularly on the public information side of things. I made reference earlier, when I was answering a question about reclamation, to the development of a web-based portal. I've seen mock-ups of it operating in the absence of the Internet, and it's well along the way. I think that portions of it will be available much sooner, in the time frame of three to six months, but there are other aspects that will obviously take longer.

Ms Blakeman: There's been a reduction in money around air monitoring and water monitoring, but integrated information is important. What information are you looking at integrating if you have less of it from your monitoring activities?

Mr. Renner: I think the concept is that you have sort of almost a one-window approach to information, both from an approval holder's perspective and also from a public perspective. Right now we have a wealth of information that is held by Alberta Environment and other ministries, but it's in a raw data form. It's not that useful. It's not that user friendly. What we need to do is have a place where people can go and find information that is accessible in a format that is useful to them so that they can be assured we are doing our job in protecting the environment and that at the same time there is a greater degree of accountability on our part. We then can be held more accountable if we're more transparent.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. When you're spending money, which you don't have at your fingertips but you'll get for me, is that where the money is being spent, analyzing and interpreting that raw data to make it more user friendly to the public and get it onto this Internet site?

Mr. Renner: That's part of it.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. When you supply me with the figures on the money that you're actually using for this project, can you give me some better idea of exactly what you're spending the money on?

Mr. Renner: Well, you know, it's like any other kind of IT project. It's a long-term project, and there's a lot of expense involved in it. One of the projects that, again, I've seen demonstrated is referred to as mining. Basically, it's software that has been written internally that would actually drill down into all of the other databases of other ministries – ERCB and Energy, SRD – and that would be based on the principle of a GPS kind of technology. You could point to somewhere on a map and identify various and sundry approvals, issues that have arisen as associated with that particular parcel of land or that particular stretch of the river or air quality.

Ms Blakeman: That sounds really exciting, so if you can just give me the money and how that's broken down with consultants or how that money is actually being allocated.

Mr. Renner: My deputy advised me that one of these websites that I've been talking about, the state of the environment website, should be up and running within about two months.

Ms Blakeman: Great. Okay. Well, terrific. I'm still looking for the

money and exactly how you're spending it and how many consultants you have and what they're being paid. That would be great.

The four CCS projects that have been announced, it strikes me that nothing has actually been signed. Now, the media releases say that letters of intent have been signed but no funds will be disbursed until they enter into a funding agreement. I'm just confirming that no companies have received money to this point. Have any of them actually signed a memorandum of agreement or of understanding, or are we still at the letter of intent stage with all four of them?

Mr. Renner: The entire CCS project is under the Department of Energy, and the funds are in their budget.

Ms Blakeman: So you don't have anything to do with it?

Mr. Renner: We're there from an oversight perspective. We will have a role to play, again from an approval perspective, but the actual finances are not us with one exception. There was \$5 million out of the Ecotrust fund that was included in the TransAlta proposal.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So how many of your staff are assigned to this liaison, oversight, discussion mode that you're in?

Mr. Renner: Relatively few that would be there on a regular basis. Again, once the projects begin to move down the line of approvals, there'll be more and more people, but probably at this point no more than about five.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Page 180, the climate change and emissions management fund. There is a decrease in the fund. Can you explain why there's a decrease here? I'm sure there's an explanation. It's probably a decline in production or an increase in climate management or something.

Mr. Renner: It's a little bit of both. It's a flow-through fund. The amount of dollars that are shown in the budget that reflect a decrease were an estimate. The actual results are different for two reasons. Part of it is reduced economic activity, but the larger reason is because we've had a larger than expected take-up on some of the offsets that are associated with it. We've had, you know, a number of the companies that have used a fairly substantial proportion of our protocols that we put in place that had offsets. So I think it's a good-news story. We saw real reductions in CO₂ from offsets, and we saw some real reductions in CO₂ as a result of them improving their internal processes as well. But at the end of the day, it's a straight flow-through. Every dollar that comes in, we turn around and send back to the emissions management board. They're now in the process of determining where those dollars will be invested.

Ms Blakeman: How long do you think this fund is going to last? What do you see as the long-term plans for this fund?

9:05

Mr. Renner: I think that in the absence of this North American climate change regime that we're talking about, we'll be keeping this fund operative in Alberta for some time. Once we end up with a North American regulatory regime, I suspect that you'll see some changes to this fund, you know, so simple as, perhaps: now that Saskatchewan has similar kinds of legislation, we may want to look at whether or not it makes sense for us to jointly manage a technology fund between the two provinces. But I think that is wholly dependent upon what the final mitigation strategy looks like and regulatory regime looks like. We've been fighting very, very hard

and will continue to do so to ensure that there is an opportunity for a fund like ours to be part of that regulatory regime. If it's recognized and if it is, this fund will be there for some time to come.

Ms Blakeman: It's a good idea but tough to integrate it into this system.

Do you see an increase in the cost of overemitting in the short term, or if not, would there be a decrease in the maximum level of the emissions from the current 100,000 tonnes? Are you looking at adjusting this either way?

Mr. Renner: Well, the federal government has already implemented mandatory reporting at the 50,000 tonne level. So we'll have those numbers available now to us, and we can get a much better idea on who the players are and what the magnitude of those would be now that we have those numbers. We've been guesstimating and estimating, but we'll have a much more precise number.

B.C. has indicated that it is their intention to reduce the threshold to 25,000 tonnes. I don't know if we'll get that low in the near future, but I suspect at some point in time.

Ms Blakeman: Are you considering going to the 50,000?

Mr. Renner: You know, in this world when someone says maybe, they mean yes. We have given it consideration. Don't interpret that to say that we are going to do it, but we certainly have had some serious looks at what the implications would be and whether or not we would be in the position to move, again, in the absence of some kind of a North American strategy.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I think you need to go there. That certainly would be my policy.

There's a question about why 30 per cent of this fund is directed at CCS projects when you've already got the government providing the promised \$2 billion. Can you answer that?

Mr. Renner: I think there was a commitment that was made when we set this fund up that we would manage the fund in a way that roughly equated to the sectors that contributed to the fund, so the 30 per cent is a reflection of the fact that approximately 30 per cent of the fund is derived from oil sands.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So far there were 223 initial submissions; 30 were asked to complete the full proposals. The deadline was February 28. Of the 30 full proposals, how many were received by the deadline?

Mr. Renner: I don't know. I don't know if anybody has that information.

Ms Blakeman: Somebody does. They're looking. You'll get it to me?

Mr. Renner: The board is managed at arm's length, so we could probably get that information from the board. They would not as a rule report back to us until they've made some decisions. Now that they've received their submissions from the 30 that were on the short list, they'll be making some announcements. There are not sufficient funds to fund all 30 anyway. So if only 28 of the 30 respond, they'll still have more than enough proposals to allocate all of the dollars.

Ms Blakeman: Who determines the criteria that would prioritize those, then?

Mr. Renner: They do. The board. Eric Newell is the chairman of the board.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I remember that.

Under the heading of carbon credits, can the . . .

The Chair: Thank you. That concludes this section.

We'll go next to Mr. Broyce Jacobs.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I certainly think that you have a very challenging portfolio to represent the environment for the government of Alberta. I don't want you to get too proud, but you handle it well. I am impressed that you never lose your temper. I think sometimes you have just cause.

I'm going to start out with, you know, somewhat of a fun question, perhaps. In your opinion as Minister of Environment what is Alberta's biggest environmental challenge and/or risk?

Mr. Renner: Well, coming from Cardston I suspect you'll be very disappointed if I don't say water, and I don't say that without actually meaning it. We spend so much time and effort talking about oil sands and talking about industrial development, but you and I both know that in the absence of a clean, secure source of water all of the rest of the discussions become somewhat meaningless.

Mr. Jacobs: So what are you going to do about that challenge?

Mr. Renner: Well, as you know, we've currently got a moratorium in place on licences on the South Saskatchewan. That has now gotten the people in southern Alberta attuned to the fact that we don't have a limitless resource, that we now have to start thinking about how we are going to allocate that limited resource in an equitable and responsible way.

We're really doing two things. One is to step up the game when it comes to groundwater because experience tells us that in other jurisdictions that have slowed up the allocation of surface water licences, the result has been unsustainable pressure on groundwater. We need to step up our game when it comes to groundwater and understand in a much better way the connectivity between groundwater and surface water. We need to get on with updating our water allocation regime to facilitate the transfer of water diversion rights from existing holders to potential new holders because in the absence of that we can't accommodate population growth and we can't accommodate new industrial growth in that region.

Mr. Jacobs: Well, I certainly agree with you that water is a huge challenge. You know, one of your predecessors came out with a strategy called water for life, and maybe we'll talk about that in a minute.

I want to go into what you just said: achieving the balance between allocation of water and growth of municipalities and cities and towns in southern Alberta where there is a moratorium and where there is a perception that because of the moratorium growth may be inhibited in southern Alberta. Could you just elaborate a little bit more on how we're going to go forward given the moratorium? You know, we still have water. It's not like we won't have water to drink tomorrow. We do have water, but growth is becoming a challenge, as you are well aware. Could you elaborate a little bit more on how we are going to satisfy these people down there that want some growth but are limited by the amount of water?

Mr. Renner: I think there are two areas that we need to concentrate

on. We have to, first of all, acknowledge that for the most part we're not dealing with a shortage of water. We're dealing with a misalignment of where the water holders don't necessarily match up with the sources of demand. That's where the allocation discussion comes from.

But I think it's much broader than that. When you look at the per capita use of water that we have, not only in southern Alberta but throughout Alberta, it's almost embarrassing to compare it to a lot of other jurisdictions that have been dealing with limited water and water shortages for a longer period of time. There is still a huge amount of room for us to deal with the conservation side. We need to become much more efficient with the way we use water. We need to acknowledge that we're living in a semi-arid region in southern Alberta and that maybe the times are here when we have to reassess our commitment to lush, green grass landscaping in our yards, you know, those kinds of things that we've been accustomed to. We need to have a much greater focus on recycling of water, reuse of water. Municipal waste water is a prime source. We need to think about ways that we can continue to expand the opportunities that we have for the collection of rainwater, the use of grey water that can be incorporated into building codes. There's a lot of room that we still have to use the water that we have much more efficiently.

9:15

But at the end of the day I think that we also have to start to put some long-term plans in place to talk about how we're going to manage the physical aspect of water, and by that I mean storage. I don't think that we should for a moment think that we can solve our water problem and it will magically go away if we just build one or two dams. I know there are some out there that are suggesting that if we would just build a couple dams, we wouldn't have to go through all of this. Building dams today in the absence of correcting some of the issues that we have on the water allocation, on the water conservation side would just exacerbate the problem. It would probably leave that problem in the hands of politicians into the future, but the problem that they would have would be even more severe than the one that we have today because once you reach a point where you've got that many more people that have become accustomed to using water inefficiently, you've got an even bigger problem to resolve.

I think the focus for us right now needs to be on ensuring that we've got a water allocation policy that fairly reflects some of the historic realities with respect to some of the licence holders. Some of the very large licences, senior licences in southern Alberta are in the hands of the agriculture industry. I don't think for a moment that anyone should think that somehow we're going to pit rural against urban and we're going to start to unilaterally take water away from our agricultural areas. But, that being said, we need to give some opportunity for our agricultural community to make the kind of investments that they, I know, are prepared to make into increasing the efficiency of the way they use the water. They can do that and actually in some cases increase the land that's under irrigation and still free up additional water that can be reallocated to other areas.

The other thing that I think is imperative for us when we talk about water is that we've got to get into a proper mindset in the way that we deal with the whole issue of long-term planning, so water storage of one kind or another. While I don't believe that we should be getting into building additional storage capacity today, I do think that we need to start thinking about how and where we can accommodate that additional storage at some point in the future. As we have development – it gets back to what we were talking about earlier tonight on land-use framework – if we can designate certain places that are suitable and appropriate for water storage, then when

the time comes to develop that storage, we don't have to buy up and move a whole bunch of people and industries that have built and got themselves developed into areas that now are going to be under several metres of water.

Mr. Jacobs: I certainly think you make valid points. However, I think we have a communication challenge ahead of us to make a lot of people understand that conservation and wise allocation and use of water are extremely important because, as you already said, many people believe that just building more storage would solve all our problems.

I know that if some of my colleagues on the irrigation boards were here and listening to our debate, the next question they would ask you is: in consideration of what you've just said, where does the old principle of first in time, first in line play into that scenario?

Mr. Renner: Well, I know that acronym very well. It's actually FITFIR: first in time, first in right. It's a policy that has served us well for over a hundred years, and it needs to be respected. But at the same time we need to consider whether there are ways that we can modify FITFIR, recognizing historic rights but also providing for some flexibility. FITFIR is a system that is very, very clear in that a senior licence has seniority over a junior licence. Even if it's only a matter of, you know, months or days, the historical record will indicate that a licence issued in 1956 in December is junior to a licence that was issued in 1956 in March.

If we're going to be able to have a reasonable way of managing these transfers in a way that won't get bogged down in detail that is beyond belief, we may have to have a look at ways that we could modify FITFIR so that we could put some of these licences into more groupings as opposed to individual seniority. That may be one way that we can introduce a little bit more flexibility into the system.

Mr. Jacobs: You know, I think we can take encouragement from the manner in which the users of the irrigation water, for example, in southern Alberta have reacted during some acute times of shortage of water. For example, in 2001-2002 irrigation boards actually got together and shared water with towns and villages. Some of them had senior licences, but they actually co-operated with junior licence holders. I think we can take hope from that.

One final question on water before I move to another area. You know, the water for life strategy was certainly a landmark document as far as Alberta is concerned and probably put Alberta ahead of many jurisdictions on water planning. What is the next step as far as implementing water for life? Are we there? Do we have more challenges? Where are we going in that direction?

Mr. Renner: I don't think the water for life document is one that we will ever just be able to check off and say: "There; that one's done. We'll move on." We, as you know, just had a review of water for life and renewed the water for life strategy in light of the present circumstances. Much larger population from the time that it was originally instituted, significant amount of industrial development, the moratorium that's in place on the South Saskatchewan: all of these things, I think, were substantial enough to warrant us having a look at the water for life strategy to determine whether what was valid when it was originally put in place remains valid and appropriate today. The conclusion that was reached by the Water Council is that yes it is, and we need to continue to move forward.

The discussion we've just had with respect to water allocation is certainly part of that. We need to continue to put emphasis on investment into much-needed infrastructure, regional water and waste-water systems. It's somewhat disappointing, I have to point

out, even though it's not in my budget, that the hundred million dollars that was in the water for life program for investment in regional water and waste-water projects has been reprofiled and extended out into future years, so there's only \$63 million available this. It's still a lot of money in anybody's books: \$63 million buys a lot of things, but it doesn't buy a lot of regional pipelines.

9:25

We're going to have to continue to stay vigilant. We recognize that with the literally billions of dollars that we now have invested in water and waste-water infrastructure in this province, there needs to be a plan in place that will not only provide for expansion to meet new population and growth, but increasingly as that infrastructure ages, we're going to have to have a plan in place that recognizes that there's going to have to be replacement and upgrades done to all of that existing infrastructure. When you're talking \$3 billion to \$5 billion a year, it's a lot more than \$100 million a year that you're going to have to spend on that kind of infrastructure.

Mr. Jacobs: I certainly agree with your comments on water. That's probably our greatest environmental challenge.

But I would like to go to a subject that's been alluded to a little bit already tonight, and that's the subject of climate change. I certainly am one that believes in climate change. I'm not convinced yet of the extent of climate change being caused by human behaviour. The science seems to me to be all over the map on that one, and I think you could probably justify almost any position you want to take by some group of scientists.

However, having said that, I think, you know, what's important for us today as leaders is to strike the right balance. We certainly don't want to be caught, you mentioned already tonight, a hundred years down the road. I think you said you didn't want to have stress in your grave. I'm not sure what that means. Anyway, I think it'll take more than a hundred years myself. We need to be sure that we strike a balance now. I don't think we want to put so many restrictions in place that we inhibit development, so we need to strike a balance.

A couple of questions for you, Minister. I would be interested in your comments. I read some of the news clippings from Copenhagen and the conference that took place there. I know you were there, so I wonder if you'd just spend a couple of minutes with your observations on, you know – surely some of these scientists at

Copenhagen have heard of the other science that has been alluded to tonight. What are your impressions from that conference? What do we need to learn from that, and where are we going to have to go?

Mr. Renner: Well, first of all, the reference to my grave: I guess I'm just announcing in advance that cremation is probably not in the cards for me. I'd rather be around to perhaps experience in one way or another what happens.

On a serious note, the whole issue of climate change and the experience that I had in Copenhagen was such that I think that no one can understand the passions with which much of the world is dealing with climate change. I'm not suggesting for a moment that that is wrong, or I'm not suggesting for a moment that that degree of passion shouldn't be there. I'm stating it as a fact. If you leave Alberta, you leave Canada, and you go particularly into Europe but increasingly more of the jurisdictions throughout the world, climate change is something that the people are extremely passionate about and are insistent that their governments do something.

That being said, I think there are ample reasons why we should be acting in Alberta beyond that, if for no other reason than for us not to take appropriate action, for us to be seen not to be taking climate change seriously, we seriously jeopardize our ability to continue to do business in the global environment. If we are seen to be a jurisdiction that is not taking its responsibility seriously, there are already the inklings of repercussions on our downstream customer side. I think that they would increase dramatically if Alberta was to suddenly say that we're not going to do anything about climate change.

The Chair: Thank you very much for those final comments. Our time has concluded for estimates for the Department of Environment.

I would like to just add that you did say that you were going to provide some answers in written form. The written responses should be sent through the Clerk of the Assembly or the clerk of the committee for all members to enjoy.

I'd also like to remind committee members that the vote on these estimates is scheduled for March 18.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) the meeting is adjourned.

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

