

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Wednesday, November 5, 1980

*Chairman: Mr. Mandeville*

*10:10 a.m.*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning all. We have a quorum, so I will bring our meeting to order. I think you all have a copy of last week's minutes. Are there any errors or omissions in our last minutes? Is there any business arising out of the minutes? If not, we'll have the minutes filed and, committee members, as you suggested, we have the Department of Environment here this morning. We welcome our minister and his staff, and I'd like to introduce to you Mr. Walter Solodzuk, the Deputy Minister of Environment, and Mr. Bill Simon, with the minister to help in answering questions this morning.

Before we start, possibly I could get Mr. Clegg to swear in our two witnesses.

*Mr. Solodzuk and Mr. Simon were sworn in.*

MR. CHAIRMAN: We also have Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Heisler, and Mr. Rogers with us this morning. You, gentlemen, also abide by the oath you have taken in the past, and will have that stand.

To start our meeting this morning, possibly we could call on the Minister of Environment to make a few remarks. What we've been doing in the past, Mr. Minister, is: the minister has a few opening remarks and then the committee members direct questions to yourself and you direct them to whichever one of the witnesses you so desire to answer the questions. So I will turn the meeting over now to Mr. Cookson.

MR. COOKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The two gentlemen to my left have been introduced so I don't have to go through that exercise.

Just to perhaps briefly outline to members the responsibilities of my department. We operate under about 13 different pieces of legislation, and we have both the deputy in the department and three assistant deputies. They administer different parts of the department. One of the areas, as you probably know, is the responsibility for pollution prevention and control. Another area that we are responsible for is land conservation; the Act under which we operate there is The Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act. Under another division of the department we also administer the responsibility of water resources, all water in the province, and that department comes under The Water Resources Act, and also the well drillers development Act.

Part of the department is involved with environmental research, and under that we have The Alberta Environmental Research Trust Act; also provision under The Environment Act itself for research work. We have a Canada-Alberta agreement -- at least we did have -- under what is known as AOSERP, which is an oil sands environmental research program, which is at the present time being primarily operated by Alberta. And then we have an overview and co-ordination of the environment conservation branch, and this is the Environment Council of Alberta, which operates under The Environment Council Act. Its responsibility is basically to carry out hearings throughout the province on occasion, and to report to the department.

Other than that, Mr. Chairman, I welcome questions. We do have the responsibility for waste management, too, and that includes not only the

handling of effluent from the municipalities, but also we are responsible for administering recycling programs such as The Beverage Container Act.

We have two pieces of legislation that deal with chemicals: The Agricultural Chemicals Act and The Hazardous Chemicals Act. In terms of air, we have The Clean Air Act, and of water, The Clean Water Act.

The accounts that we'll be reviewing, '78 and '79, of course, were accounts that were incurred prior to my taking the ministry, and I guess we all labor under that problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We have the three volumes of the public accounts, and any references that are to be made to the public accounts, it would be appreciated if you could direct your questions to Mr. Al O'Brien. He's here as a resource person in that area.

To start our question period off today, we'll call on Mr. Pengelly.

MR. PENGELLY: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the minister could tell me -- and that's referring to Volume 2, Vote 5 on environmental research -- what the general environmental money expended was; research into what areas?

MR. COOKSON: Under Vote 5 we have what is classified as a research secretariat, and his major responsibility is to receive recommendations from the public across Alberta and also from an organization within the universities themselves. The amount allocated for that in 1978-79 was estimated at \$919,911. A good portion of that money, Mr. Chairman, goes to the Alberta Research Council. The Alberta Research Council, as you know, is a major organization that, in co-ordination with private enterprise, carries out various kinds of programs, so that, I guess, to answer your question, this is the major area where funds are expended.

There is also the Alberta oil sands environmental research program, and you can see the amount that's allocated there. Just to touch on that, this organization is primarily working in the oil sands area of northern Alberta and it was initiated by joint agreement between the federal government and ourselves. We were to jointly share the funding. As of the spring of '79 the federal government decided to withdraw its portion of the funding for this area, and the province has carried on the research work that's taking place up there. It's an organization of people right on-site at the tar sands, and they're doing various kinds of work to determine the impact of the tailings which these huge areas that are being excavated, (inaudible) and the amounts being relocated, and we, as yet, have not really formed a policy as to whether to continue to fund in this amount or not. A lot of it hinges on the sort of arrangements perhaps we can make with the federal government, so we simply continue to complete research work that's being done in that area.

In addition, under that Vote 5, we also are doing the funding at the new Vegreville research centre. It hasn't been officially opened yet, and we're hoping to do that this fall. Most of the funds provided are for staff and equipment. The capital cost was borne by Public Works. As I say, we hope we'll be able to open that officially within weeks.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask the minister to just update us, one, in general, on the Bow River, as to what has happened over the summer, and then, secondly, progress on the treatment plant at Calgary Fish Creek.

MR. COOKSON: Mr. Chairman, as is generally known now, we have adjusted our standards with regard to emissions which cause algae growth in bodies of water throughout the province. Of course, one of the main offenders is phosphorus, although there are other elements, nitrogen, and so on, but we came to the

conclusion through our research and work and experience in other parts of the world, that phosphorus is probably the most easy and most practical element to control. On the basis of that and studies that our people have done, we set the new guidelines across the province for phosphate emission into bodies of water. In doing so, we, as a government, decided we should make a one-time contribution towards this. We are of the opinion that there will eventually be about five large centres that will be involved. Since all five of those centres primarily are exempt from our shared cost programs, we felt it proper to help balance the books a little bit in this area.

So to answer the question with regard to the Bow River, and specifically on the phosphorus thing, there are two large treatment plants in Calgary. The most recent one to be expanded is the Fish Creek sewage plant. It's one of the more updated, newer operations -- certainly in western Canada -- and while it is not using the phosphorus treatment process as yet, we are of the opinion the upgrading of that plant will considerably reduce the contamination into the Bow. It won't solve the total problem, but will reduce it.

In addition, we have advised Calgary that they will be required to upgrade both their facilities and use the special treatment to bring the phosphorus down to what we consider an acceptable level. Calgary is working towards this. I think the completion will be in 1983, and so in that respect, Mr. Chairman, we are moving co-operatively with one of the major problem areas.

In addition, we are looking at the total southern Saskatchewan basin system, and we're getting interim reports of progress on that. It will still be another year or two before they're finalized. As to further recommendations to deal with not just the Bow River specifically but the total south Saskatchewan system, we are also looking at sources of pollution from other than effluent from the major city. In that respect we have not as yet made any decision on this, but we are concerned about the possible other sources of contamination which we may have to deal with. I can't really comment much more in that area until we have further information.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, a supplementary to the minister. The minister indicated the adjustment of emission levels specifically with regard to the phosphates. When will that suggested policy take effect? Is it in effect at the moment or won't take effect until the moneys are made available to the large centres to upgrade their systems? The one goes hand in hand. Is that the timing the minister has in mind?

MR. COOKSON: The money is available now. The money is committed, but it won't be transferred over to the city until such time as their equipment is in place. We'll make interim payments as this proceeds. My information -- perhaps Walter might like to add to that -- is that it will be '83 before the total system is in operation.

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman, I was interested in the minister's remarks with respect to the oil sands environmental research efforts, and the point made that there was no policy with respect to continued funding and part of that involved discussions with the federal government. Surely wouldn't our concern be with respect to the need for those research efforts, and wouldn't the government of Alberta expect to continue that effort if it was required, based on oil sands development more than federal participation? I wonder if you could clarify those remarks.

MR. COOKSON: The deputy is just telling me the time at which the agreement with Canada expired. I was thinking it was '79, but it was March of 1980, so we're operating without an agreement at the present time.

I think that I can answer it this way for the member. At the present time we're preparing a recommendation to government as to the outcome in the future. Personally, I would like to see the work continue because of its extreme importance, but that report isn't before us as yet.

MR. L. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, I understand that there is a regional study on water being done around Calgary, or a Calgary regional study, similar to that which was done around Edmonton to Vegreville. I am wondering where that study is, what phase it's in, and when it will be presented.

MR. COOKSON: Mr. Chairman, we have received the report on the recommendations by the Calgary regional planning commission and the total study. At this point in time it's within the study of the government. We are attempting to assess the total picture because, as you know, it has projections for growth both within Calgary and for all the areas surrounding Calgary. Based on those projected growths, if we're certain of those projections, we'll have a better idea of what's going to be required in terms of both water and sewage, which are two of the most important problems we're faced with.

So to answer the question: it's within government circles at the present time; being reviewed.

MR. L. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, a supplementary. I wonder, do you have any sort of time line that you're looking at, when the study will be made public?

MR. COOKSON: The document is not public as yet. It's being reviewed by policy committee and it will be reviewed also by government caucus. A time frame. I always hate to put time frames on things, but we're moving as quickly as we can on it because it's an important issue that has to be settled out there. I would say that certainly by the turn of the year we should have a better idea of where we're going.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, the question is to the Minister of Environment. But before the question, first of all I'd like to pass on my compliments to him and his department with respect to their approach, their involvement, and their commitment to very needed construction works on the Paddle River. I think that Mr. Solodzuk particularly, I'm sure, is very well aware of the history of the Paddle River in northwestern Alberta, with its annual flooding and the like, and a group of people have been working on that particular program for upwards of 15 or 20 years. The commitment is fine.

But my concern now is with another river in that same area, and that's the Pembina River which, over the last several years, has overflowed its banks. I wonder if Mr. Solodzuk could bring me up to date as to the matters that his department is looking at to control the flooding and what appears to now have become, in recent years, almost an annual inundation that's affected upwards of 300 and 400 farmers in the area, really, from Sangudo to Jarvie.

MR. COOKSON: I'll direct that to Walter and we'll see what he has to respond.

MR. SOLODZUK: Mr. Chairman, I think that perhaps if I can go back in history just for a little while, but to those who probably aren't acquainted with the drainage basin, the flooding problems of the Paddle and the Pembina are a common occurrence and, of course, they belong to the same watershed. And, of course, when you have a flood on the Pembina, you also have a flood on the Paddle.

The recognition was there since probably the early '40s, but, as Mr. Kowalski mentioned, I've been associated with it since the early '50s, anyway. But in the late '50s or '58-59, as some of you may remember, we initiated

first the flood control measure on the Pembina and that is through the process of channel improvement. The program there at the time was to eliminate all the exaggerated meander loops in the river and try to improve the flow of the Pembina River before one can add anything else to it, which, of course, is the Paddle. Simultaneously with this we did a reservoir study upstream on the Pembina River -- it's at the Entwistle site -- and I think the record will show that we went as far at that time as to even secure most of the land for the reservoir.

So while the work was going on on the Pembina, then the focus, of course, in the later years, was on the Paddle, on the flood control program through channel improvement and, of course, on the matter of reservoirs.

The thrust in the last few years has been strictly focused on the Paddle basin rather than on the Pembina basin at this time, because of the previous work that was done there to alleviate some of the flooding. Our concern on the Pembina has been raised again, and I know that we have been dealing with it at this time. But we have not really formulated any additional or future plans as to what would happen on the Pembina River. We have some meetings scheduled sometime in the next little while, but we do not have anything as a firm implementation plan, other than what I have mentioned that was done in the past, at the present time.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, if I could raise a supplementary on the basic issue.

What is the current status of this land that was obtained, as I understand, upwards of a dozen or so years ago for the construction of a possible reservoir in the Pembina and Entwistle area? Does the Department of Environment still have ownership to that land?

MR. SOLODZUK: To the best of my knowledge, that land is being reserved for that purpose. The ownership, of course, rests with the Department of Energy and Natural Resources, which is the owner of it. The lands are reserved for a reservoir site.

MR. PAHL: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I could just ask a supplementary.

What sort of cost/benefits have been done and will continue to be done on that project? It was my recollection that there was some doubt as to whether there was all that much advantage to the effort, if taken too far.

MR. SOLODZUK: Mr. Chairman, I guess we have to refer to both projects, both the Paddle and Pembina. I don't have the information at my fingertips right now, but there was a cost/benefit study done on the Pembina, I would think sometime in the late '60s. I think that some of you may be aware that when the ECA Paddle River hearings were conducted -- and this would be, I would think, in '75 or thereabouts -- that the cost/benefit study was submitted as a public document at the hearing, and it is on record that whatever it was, the figure of 38:1 or 40 cents on the dollar, something in that order . . . But I think it's there.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, I think my colleague from Mill Woods has confused the Paddle with the Pembina, because I recall the cost/benefit was done really on the Paddle rather than the Pembina. So my supplementary question basically is that there was talk a dozen or so years ago over a reservoir in the Entwistle area, and there was a reason for not going ahead with it. Can you advise me what that reason was?

MR. SOLODZUK: The best I can do, Mr. Chairman, the reason was that the Pembina had some flood control measures implemented downstream of a place called

Manola, which is the confluence of the Paddle and the Pembina rivers. We again did a channel improvement program from that area, which is Manola all the way down to Jarvie or Fawcett, which is a distance of some 60 miles, probably 70 miles of river. And we did it through the channel improvement program. The decision was then made that we would focus on the Paddle, and that's where we are today.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, my question to the minister relates to Vote 6.0.1 regarding the Environment Council of Alberta. I was just wondering if the minister would be able to indicate what percentage, in rough terms, would be spent from that allocation on public participation mechanisms, advisory committees and so on to the council, and if, in a general sense, he could indicate whether or not the council plans to increase that aspect of its operation.

MR. COOKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry I don't have the breakdown. I could get that for the member. They do file a yearly financial statement of the breakdown.

Just perhaps to add further to the question on the Environment Council of Alberta for those who perhaps aren't familiar with the operation. We have Alistair Crerar, the chief executive officer, who administers the council under the legislation. First of all, they establish under the legislation public advisory groups across the province. I think there are some 120 representing different organizations on a public advisory group. They meet yearly and, other than their basic out-of-pocket expenses for meetings, they pretty well are voluntary, so that, I guess, is not a major expenditure in terms of costs for that group.

Mr. Crerar also has his own support staff who are paid out of the allocation. Our own department does a fair amount of research work for the Environment Council. We have the expertise and the funds so that if it comes to a matter of research in a specific area.

We try to space out the work that they're doing so that, for example, hearings don't pile up at certain times. We spread them out in such a way that the public isn't confused about the work they're doing. In this respect I think we try to time a hearing on a major policy issue of some type at least once a year and sometimes we average 1.5. It's at these public hearings that there are some fairly substantial expenditures. But I could get the complete breakdown.

I don't know whether the auditors might have anything to add to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. O'Brien, did you have anything further to add?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, I don't think so. The financial statements of the council don't show a breakdown by program under your activity. They only show the objects of expenditure.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, could the minister indicate whether or not he utilizes the advisory committees directly, or whether their advice is just directly related to the work of the council with respect to its hearings?

MR. COOKSON: We do use the advisory committees for responses on occasion. For example, if our department has a particular issue that we would like some direction on, then we correspond directly to the Environment Council, and we ask them to review it and give us a recommendation. So we do make use of them ourselves, other than the work that they do based on their public advisory members.

MR. D. ANDERSON: One last supplementary, if I might, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate that information from the minister and am glad to hear that the advice of the advisory groups is being utilized by the minister directly. Can the advisory groups as well make direct recommendations to the minister or the government, unsolicited? In other words, can they initiate programs or suggest programs to the department without the initiative coming from the minister or the chairman of the council?

MR. COOKSON: Yes, they can and they do. They have, I think, three advisory groups. One is on science. I think they have an educational advisory group, and one other. They meet on occasion. If, for example, there's an emergency situation in the province that they feel should be dealt with, they can pass a special emergent resolution which they, in turn, pass directly to me. It's, again, a recommendation which we deal with.

MR. McCRAE: Mr. Chairman, I want first to acknowledge the hon. minister's willingness to discuss matters that are considerably beyond the purview of the '78-79 public accounts, and that is future planning and so on, and to say that I think it's something that we appreciate in terms of answering the public accounts questions for that time frame that, in response to questions, he gets also into future planning.

I have a specific question, Mr. Chairman, and it relates to Vote No. 3, under the heading Land Conservation. I know that we have, I think, some of the best environmental laws probably anywhere, certainly I think in Canada, and one aspect of that is the land reclamation legislation (where), my understanding is, we've taken government moneys and gone out and reclaimed specific projects -- mines, forestry projects, or whatever -- where the company, corporation, or individual who may have caused the problem is no longer around to correct the situation. I wonder if the minister or one of his officials might elaborate on some of the reclamation projects that might have been undertaken during that public accounts period of '78-79: where they were, the cost, what was done. Also, if he could look forward a bit and tell us where we are in that schedule of happenings; that is, reclaiming old, unsightly, or unsafe, dangerous projects, particularly what was done in the past public accounts year.

MR. COOKSON: Mr. Chairman, perhaps while we're trying to locate the information for the interest of members, to make sure that there is no confusion between the funding, we have, as you know, a substantial fund allocated out of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, and we've asked for a further extension of that. I would think that -- I guess it's fair to say -- perhaps the place to discuss that would be at a review of capital funding from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund. But under The Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act we do allocate funds, as you can see from our own budget, for this type of work where we have what is called regulated surface operations.

For example, all the pipeline work and all the oil work, the roadways, all the strip mining, all the gravel and other mineral mining and so on, comes under the budget of the department, is administered by the The Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act. So I want to make sure that we separate the two.

Basically, the Heritage Savings Trust Fund moneys are used for primarily those events that happened prior to the bringing in of this legislation that we administer under now. And that deals, then, with abandoned gravel pits. It deals with our problems of old coal mines. It also deals -- I may be corrected on this -- in the areas of sewage lagoons. It also deals with those. That comes out of the trust fund account.

Now if we go to the expenditures within my own department for this specific purpose we have another separation. The statistic I'm going to give you here deals with specifically with deeded lands; lands other than Crown. The funds for that work would come out of Energy and Natural Resources. The total expenditure was \$2,251,000 for that '78-79 period. Again, this chart is not an audited expenditure, but it gives you an indication of the allocation. These include access roads, sewage lagoons, garbage pits, mine hazard sites, sand and gravel sites, seismic work, water storage sites, (inaudible) pit sites, abandoned recreational sites, erosion control projects which are often primarily in the north, industrial sites, coal exploration trails, well sites, tower sites, and some of the funds were used for reclamation research.

So, generally speaking, there were 93 projects done out of our budget in these various areas during the '78-79 period. . . . I stand corrected. I was thinking that this came out of our own budget. There are three that I've listed that don't come under the budget of our own department; portions of three of these items. One of them was erosion control, one was some of the garbage pit costs, and some access roads, keeping in mind that we had just approved the allocation of funds from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund around that time in the history of the fund. So there is a little bit of overlapping -- approximately, then, 93 projects. As I say, it's an unaudited statement we have. One million of this was expended in the area of municipal, \$105,000 in the area of public, \$375,000 in the green area, with, as I say, an unaudited expenditure of \$2,251,000, deleting the three sums of about \$24,000 from that.

That's kind of a long explanation to the question.

MR. McCRAE: Could I thank the minister for the very complete answer and ask one follow-up. That has to do with the experimental reclamation work being done by Calgary Power at Lake Wabamun after the coal mining is complete in particular areas. I was out there a couple of years back and know that they were planting clover, I believe it was, in some areas, and barley, and I would say it looked to be a very successful operation, at least in terms of those cereal crops.

I wanted to ask the minister: is the department involved in that kind of experimentation or monitoring, or whatever, so that in the future, if we get to more coal strip mining, we'll have some better ideas as to the likelihood of success of the reclamation possibilities in different kinds of soil and so on? So I'm really enquiring what is there, or what has been their past participation in that kind of research or experimentation, and whether there is any expenditure from that in the '78-79 accounts period.

MR. COOKSON: We'll just check on that last point, but yes, we are very much involved, and both from the trust fund point of view and from our own budgetary point of view.

I might say to members that I'm quite impressed with what has happened out at Lake Wabamun. It's one of the first projects. I think it would be well worth the while of anyone in Alberta to go up at any time. I'm sure Calgary Power would be happy to show the work that's being done. I visited personally a 20-acre site which has been reclaimed by Calgary Power. In '78-79 we had eight reclamation research projects of \$730,000, so that gives you an idea as to how we are involved.

Going back to the work that's being done out there, the site that we observed was returned generally to the topographical situation that it was prior to coal mining, and they've run test strips of different grasses, et cetera. Some of the native vegetation is coming in, and one of the great friends of the Alberta farmer, the Canada thistle, doesn't seem to have any trouble growing there either. Trees are coming back in the area. There are some of our four-footed friends starting to move back into that particular



area, and areas are leased out -- parts of it -- to neighboring farmers who are harvesting the crops that are grown on the area.

I just want to suggest some caution, though, that we become too over-enthusiastic about what's happening there, because what happens in that particular situation may be entirely different from what can happen in another part of Alberta, primarily because of the climate and because of the soil structure and a lot of other factors.

The area I think that we still are, I would say in my own personal observation, concerned about, is what happens to the water table in this particular situation. That's something that we're working on gathering material. There's a lot of research going on, and it will be, I think, some time before we can really clarify that important issue.

To conclude, the work that's been done out there really looks excellent, and I'm quite impressed with it.

DR. REID: To the minister, Mr. Chairman. I was wondering if there is any information available yet on the reclamation of coal mines in the forested areas and on the growth of coniferous trees on the reclaimed land, so that under our multiple-use concept, after the coal is extracted, we can return those areas to forestation for lumber and pulpwood.

MR. COOKSON: It is a good question that's been raised. I guess our history of the province, dealing specifically with provincial boundary, is limited in this area. There has been some experimental work done in the Canmore area. I personally would like to be updated on it, and we'll check out that question. The only other area that I've personally viewed is the work being done at Grand Cache. It's a real challenge in those areas that have low growth factors in general, as to how to reclaim this land in such a way that we will curb the problems of erosion and establish vegetation. I don't know whether they are experimenting at that high level with tree growth, but they are doing some pretty good work with regrassing. We observed the work that's being done there. I guess it's about as far along as any work that's been done in an area of that type, dealing with reclamation.

MR. L. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, I guess first, as a kind of supplementary, I thought I heard the minister say that there was money available, either through the Heritage Trust Fund or the budget for reclamation of gravel pits and old mining sites on private land. Maybe he could explain that. I don't know whether he was right on that or not, or whether I heard that.

The other question I have is that in the Drumheller Valley I believe there's a restriction for building because of the 100-year flood plain. I guess my question to the minister or Walter is that if or when the Dickson dam is built, will that alleviate this situation? Will we be helped in that flood plain and building on the flood plain?

MR. COOKSON: I'll call on Walter, perhaps, to answer the last question. My information is it will help to control the problem of the flooding, but I think perhaps Walter might have some further information on that.

With regard to your first question: both from the trust fund and our own budget, we do not deal with private individuals. There are some situations where, for example, a coal mine has been abandoned for a long time and the land is still owned by the company, where we may do some funding to help clean up the problem. There won't be a direct contribution to the company. We require their land to be in the name of the Crown or, in the case of all sewage lagoons, old lagoons that are abandoned, we make an agreement with the municipality concerned, and that is a contract which spells out quite clearly that within a 10-year period, if, once the province has reclaimed, the land is

then sold, we would have first right of purchase; or, in a complementary way, we would have the right to recover our costs, and these would come back into provincial revenue.

So in that area we are very clear that we deal with municipalities or, in the case of Crown land, it's owned by the province.

MR. SOLODZUK: Mr. Chairman, I'm not so sure I can elaborate and give you a very specific answer to that question, but, as you may be aware, that we have undertaken a study of a flood reduction program for Drumheller. Of course you're also aware that the Dickson dam will be operated for flood attenuation. However, I am not at this time prepared to give you a specific answer to your question in saying, well, how much will the Dickson dam reduce the flood, or, if we compare it to the 100-year flood, how much will it reduce, and will the dykes be only necessary for, say, a flood that has a return period of 50 years. In general, it is our hope that the operating mode of the reservoir is -- well, it is -- committed for flood reduction, and the only I answer I can't give you is just how much is it going to help: is it, you know, one foot or two feet or whatever. I'm sorry I can't give you that answer, but I'm sure the answer is available if you wish to have it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Pahl, did you have a question, or was that a supplementary, to straighten out the Pembina River?

MR. PAHL: I got it straightened out.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, the minister mentioned the Vegreville environmental centre. The opening hasn't taken place, and I was wondering what kind of projects are going on there at the present time. One of the ideas when it was initiated was to move the employees into Vegreville so that they would live there and it would sort of decentralize one of the functions, decentralize government personnel, and also flow some money into these various communities. Has that happened? Firstly, though, what has happened, in specifics, as to research?

MR. COOKSON: I can give the member an update on the present situation. Those who are involved in research work in agriculture, and this involves a lot of testing of specimens, et cetera, are relocated and working at the lab. A large part of our work in the area of pollution, and this includes water analysis as testing that comes in regularly, is at the lab. I might comment on the services we do with regard to water testing. We agreed to move most of the staff over and, because of equipment problems and because we didn't want any delay in water testing, 10 of our people are still located at Clover Bar. The equipment and everything is still there and they're still working.

Just to give the member a breakdown on the present situation in terms of staff, and related to the question of transfer. First of all, I think it's fair to say that government would never make the commitment that people have to be specifically transferred from one point to another, but I can't speak for what was said or commented on at the time the centre was located at Vegreville. There are on the staff at the present time: 97 permanent, 30 on wages and not of a permanent nature, and 17 government service members, for a total of 144 at the centre. This is as of October 24, 1980. In terms of work location, first of all, there are 85 of that permanent group located at Vegreville: 24 on wages, as opposed to the professional; 17 government service members; for a total of 126 who are located at Vegreville. Out of the total of 144, then, there are still 12 permanent employees in Edmonton and six who are in the wage category, for a total of 18. That leads to a total of 144 again.

The present home location: for Vegreville, 90 in the area of permanent, 24 in the area of wages, government services 17, for a total of 131; seven permanent and six on wages in Edmonton, for 13, which again add up to 144.

In addition, where these people were living when they were hired for the new site: in Vegreville and area, 54 were living in that general area, and in Edmonton and elsewhere there were 90 employees, again adding up to a total of 144, as of October 24, 1980.

MR. R. SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman, to the minister. I haven't had a look at the site, but there must have been some new housing development and other developments that had to take place: sewer, water. I understand there was a large \$20 million water line that is not complete or is being completed. It had an economic impact on the local municipality. Did the department or the government funnel other funds into the municipality to assist in absorbing this impact that really, in a sense, wasn't created by them, but desired by them?

I don't mind if Mr. Solodzuk answers the question. I feel that if the minister hasn't that kind of detail I'd appreciate if Mr. Solodzuk would do it. That's no reflection on the minister.

MR. COOKSON: To get the exact breakdown is pretty difficult. The only commitment that the province did make, as I understand it, for the present existing water and sewer was \$4 million. Perhaps Walter might like to elaborate as to whether that went beyond our normal shared cost programs. In addition, of course, you asked a question about the regional. At the present time we are purchasing easement for pipeline. We are also in the process of looking at a tender for pipe. Members may not know, but the quality in the general area which flows from Edmonton east on that particular line takes into consideration a number of smaller communities, Chipman for example. They have all suffered over the years from problems with good water supply. We made the judgment decision, in view of the expansion of the centre at Vegreville -- which, I think, has been a tremendous boost for the area -- to look again at the source of water supply because, again, a decision made on what we considered was practical in terms of future growth, long-term stability of the area, as to whether we should develop smaller sources of water supply or look at a total regional system. It was my recommendation that we consider a regional pipeline which would, because of its regional nature, pick up and provide supply for other communities along the way, and based on a long-term projection. I think that's a major, positive decision by our government to ensure the long-term stability of the area in terms of water supply.

Sewage handling, of course, is not that serious a problem because it flows back somewhere into the system.

So we are progressing on that, and other than that perhaps the deputy might want to comment on the breakdown of the \$4 million. I don't know of any other contributions to Vegreville and community. We have a scholarship program that's functional in the area to assist, and of course the province has, through Public Works, picked up the total capital costs of the large development.

MR. SOLODZUK: Mr. Chairman, perhaps the only thing I can add is that there was assistance given to the town of Vegreville in the area of water and sewer over and above the normal programs that extend to all the communities in Alberta. Again, to the best of my knowledge, that was about a \$4 million figure, and that would be included in the Alberta Housing and Public Works account. They looked after this infrastructure support to the town of Vegreville. With respect to housing, to the best of my knowledge there were no government

moneys expended in the area of housing, because the private sector was able to look after the additional needs of housing in Vegreville.

MR. R. SPEAKER: To the minister: in developing projects such as this -- and this may be a general question throughout the government -- I'm sure there were impacts on the school facility, impacts on the health facility, impacts on other social service areas. Is the department responsible for co-ordinating, looking at these other impacts on the community, or is there some other department in government that does that type of thing? Were those kinds of things looked at in the development of this project?

MR. COOKSON: I guess this goes back before my time, but I can comment in a general way. There was consultation about the infrastructure in these other areas and, to my knowledge, I haven't observed that that problem has surfaced. At least in my time in the ministry I haven't had any feedback concerns with regard to that. To answer the member in a general way, we do have interdepartmental committees that do take into consideration the implications of a major development in a specific area, as the member probably knows, to refer to other specific areas, the Grand Centre, Cold Lake areas, the McMurray area, and so on. So we do have co-ordination in that respect.

MR. R. SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr. Chairman, with regard to the facility itself. There were some renovations required before some of the researchers could move in and do some of their work. Have those renovations been completed and is the building now up to standard?

MR. COOKSON: Since my deputy sits on the board there that operates, he can probably update you better than I can. There were some deficiencies. Of course, Public Works has the total responsibility to complete the building and have it in proper condition so that our people can proceed to move in and operate. I guess I don't really make any apologies for this because it is a major development out there and, as with most new buildings, there are deficiencies and these have to be corrected. The architects have to ensure that it's done before the building is turned over. In this case we have these start up problems, which we've had and which we accept. We've done our best to solve these problems. I think they're pretty well on the completion stage now, but I don't know whether the deputy would like to add anything to that.

MR. SOLODZUK: Well, Mr. Chairman, about the only thing I can add is that we still have some deficiencies. There's no question about that. One that comes to mind is the fume hoods. We're having difficulty, or the manufacturer or whatever is having difficulty, getting these fume hoods operating properly. And so, when that happens of course we cannot be fully operational. However, we're trying to do the best we can with Housing and Public Works and Government Services to try to get it operational, but there are problems.

MR. PENGELLY: Mr. Chairman, two supplementaries to the minister. One technical question: what is the depth of overburden at Wabamun? I ask that in relation to the proposed Fording Coal Company development at Heathburg. The second one: could the minister at this time tell me what might be the disposition of the Crown land around the reservoir of the Dickson dam?

MR. COOKSON: While my deputy is trying to figure out the overburden, maybe I can answer the second question.

The Crown land that the province has acquired or is acquiring, subject to the construction of the Dickson dam, will primarily . . . Perhaps I could say this to members: generally speaking, when we construct a dam of this nature,

the province would naturally want to have pretty tight control over what happens around the dam, primarily because water levels fluctuate and the danger of private ownership along these water edges creates a situation that recently occurred out of Calgary at the Chestermere Lake, where cottage owners are permitted, for example, to move in and lease, or whatever, then eventually become very possessive about the body of water. This has created a fair conflict between an irrigation district out of Calgary and the residents. And so I think it's fair to say that we have to simply protect the original intent of the water which has been located there. That's our number one priority.

So to answer your question with regard to Crown lands that we have acquired around there, first of all we want to protect the original purpose of the water. We would also would like to protect the surface land area surrounding the water with regard to surface run-off, possible pollution, and erosion -- these sorts of things. So we will, I suppose it would be fair to say, resist any kind of major sorts of developments that may arise in that specific area. We will try to balance that, however, with sorts of requests by residents in the area, or municipalities, who may wish to establish some kind of a park area, or of this nature. I think, personally, too, we should reserve tree growth in the areas because of the protection for wildlife. They're having a tough enough time now in our settled areas to survive. And so that would be the objective in that respect.

The deputy says I could guess the overburden. I think I'd better take that as notice to the member. It does vary considerably, and so we'll get that information for him.

MR. D. ANDERSON: Mr. Chairman, I have two questions for either the minister and his staff or the auditors. They're with respect to the bottle return system in the province. I wasn't able to determine under which vote the costs of that program were indicated, but generally I'd like to know, first, have the costs increased greatly in this budget over previous budgets and, second -- I guess definitely to the minister and his staff -- have we yet found a method of recycling the liquor bottle aspect of that return system? Are we dealing with that through Redwood or the glass recycling plant, or are we still primarily landfilling those bottles?

MR. COOKSON: Those are good questions. I think with regard to the cost of the operations I think the province can really be proud of the efficient way it functions in terms of cost to the province. It follows through with a basic philosophy of mine that the polluter should pay. To answer the member's question, it falls under the expenditures. It comes under Vote 2, which deals with waste management: 2.6.1 Pollution Control. \$259,000 was the estimated allocation for the year '78-79, and \$241,000, rounded off, was expended.

As I say, the program is doing a tremendous job in terms of what it's costing the province. While we do have some problem areas -- perhaps to bring the members up a little bit on the present situation -- under the system, we set a rate at which both the soft drink manufacturers and fruit juice manufacturers, and in co-operation with the Alberta Liquor Control Board rate, at which the bottles and can containers will be recycled. This rate is established again in co-operation with the Alberta Liquor Control Board, and then the rate is also set at the depot level. We have these depots across the province and we try to keep their operational costs down to a minimum. We have maybe some criticism about the unsightliness of them on occasion and their lack of book keeping and so on, but when you look at this figure it indicates that we can be fairly efficient. The problem right now is the strike that is on, and I've had some correspondence. It's extremely difficult. The Alberta Liquor Control Board has an agreement with Contain-A-Way to return the bottles. Because of the strike, the masses of material,

beer coming in from outside the province, the United States, there's no recycling possibility there, because there's no use for that kind of bottle here. So everybody's getting paid, they're piling up at the depots, and Contain-A-Way is way behind in attempting to remove them.

As I understand it, at the present time the glass is simply shattered and taken to sanitary landfill. We also, of course, have that doggone problem with some of the other containers, the large two-liter plastic containers. Now I understand they are finding a use for them at the present time. So that's a plus. The tin cans are, of course, not recyclable, and -- I could stand corrected on that -- I think they're being crushed and also returned to sanitary landfills.

So I don't know whether I've answered in a rambling way some of your questions. Some of the glass is being used by some companies for development of reflectors and this sort of thing. Some of it is also being used for stuccoing purposes, but I couldn't really give you the breakdown. Because of the mass of glass that's coming around I'm sure that a lot of it is having to be put into sanitary landfill.

MR. L. CLARK: Mr. Chairman, I was informed the other day that the sanitary landfill sites will not accept plastic, hazardous chemical pails. They will accept the metal ones and they will keep them separate, but plastic ones they will not accept. I'm just wondering, is there some reason for this? Is it a policy not to accept the plastic, or they just haven't any way of getting rid of them, or what?

MR. COOKSON: I would have to check that question. Let me say this about the sanitary landfills. The department of health, or the board of health, generally speaking, establishes the sites and asks us to do an assessment of them in terms of the water table, et cetera, et cetera. We pass on our recommendations to them. In addition, the local municipality, once it is satisfied (with) the site, may pass a by-law, and that by-law will contain what can or cannot go into that particular sanitary landfill. Now Environment has just recently developed a program for this massive 2,4-D, or 2,4-whatever -- there are dozens of chemicals out there -- to bring those back into central depots. We've been very lucky in that cycling project, because I know the farmers are having a real problem, large farms, especially; those massive containers.

So we are funding, to some degree, the central points to bring those containers in, whether they're tin or whether they're plastic. Now, what happens to them from there on? In some cases there are approved sites, as I understand it, where they will be crushed and they will be located. Those sites are not too common, and so to answer your question, you may be in an area where there isn't an approved site for that. Why they make the distinction -- if they do -- between plastic and metal, I have no knowledge. I could perhaps follow that through to get the answer.

MR. L. CLARK: (Inaudible) and this is in the regional landfill site in Drumheller. They will not accept Avadex bags which will not burn because they have tinfoil. The farmers are having very great difficulty getting rid of these Avadex bags and I've had two calls on it. They won't accept them in the landfill, either. Even if they're bundled they won't accept them. They won't bury them, and they don't know what to do with them, really.

MR. COOKSON: I'm glad that question has been raised because we are, as you know, having some problems with this accumulation of some of these. At the present time the sanitary landfill operates under a by-law of the municipality or municipalities. If that's a regional, then it would be joint. They're

acting probably on recommendations from both Health and Environment. I think we've got to do a better job in locating sites or being able to handle those particular problems. It's not just a matter of sanitary landfills, but I think we've got the problem all over of trying to find safe havens for some of these problem chemicals. At the present time, as I say, in many instances they are being stored, and so it's gratifying to know someone else recognizes the problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I see, committee members, that our time has expired, and I don't see any more hands up or anyone wanting to ask any more questions. That brings me to the thought that we've finished with the Department of Environment, and is it agreed that we won't have to bring the Department of Environment back for our next meeting?

Mr. McCrae brings up a point -- I have to agree -- that we did stray from our public accounts, but we certainly appreciated, Mr. Minister, your informative meeting this morning. When we're dealing with public accounts, if we can confine ourselves to the 1978-79 volumes it would be acceptable.

On behalf of the committee members, Mr. Minister and your staff, I want to thank you for being with us and bringing us this information. Also, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Hiesler, and Mr. Rogers, we appreciate your attendance as resource personnel at our meeting.

We have agreed, and Mr. Bogle has also agreed, that he will be at our next meeting next Wednesday for public accounts: Social Services and Community Health.

Motion for adjournment?

MR. R. SPEAKER: So moved.

*The meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m.*