

[Mr. White in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We do now have a quorum. We have an agenda that was previously circulated. Might we have approval of the agenda as presented? Is it agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's carried.

We have with us the Hon. Gary Mar, the Minister of Environment, and of course the Auditor General. Mr. Minister, if you'd be so kind as to introduce your staff, then the Auditor General shall, and we'll commence with your opening.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be happy to allow the members to introduce themselves. I'll start on my far left with John Donner.

MR. DONNER: John Donner, ADM, climate change.

MR. BARRETT: Morley Barrett, ADM of natural resources.

MR. RADKE: Doug Radke, deputy minister.

MR. PERRY: Bruce Perry, senior financial officer.

MR. QUINTILIO: Craig Quintilio, director of the forest protection division.

MS TRIMBEE: Annette Trimbee, policy secretariat.

MS CHAWRUN: Carol Chawrun, communications.

MS REDFORD: Lynn Redford, minister's office.

THE CHAIRMAN: Perfect.

Perhaps, Mr. Auditor General, you'd introduce your staff now.

MR. VALENTINE: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. On my right is Mike Stratford, who's a principal in the office and has primary responsibilities for the audit of this ministry. In the gallery are Bruce Laycock, my legal counsel, and Stu Orr, a long-standing senior manager in the office.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Minister, just prior to commencement of your opening remarks, I believe there may be a motion from Mrs. O'Neill.

MRS. O'NEILL: Well, I would make the motion, Mr. Chairman, that we conclude our discussions today at 9:30 in the morning. [interjection] It is the morning, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Discussion on the matter?

MS BLAKEMAN: Why?

MRS. O'NEILL: May I repeat it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

MRS. O'NEILL: That we conclude our meeting this morning at 9:30 in light of several hours ago we just left this Chamber.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Is there further discussion?

MS BLAKEMAN: As much as I would like to spend a few more hours at rest, we are limited with the amount of time we get to spend with any given department, and I don't see that the department of environmental protection is any less worthy of the full hour and a half of sharing of information than any other department. So I would oppose that motion. We're here to perform an obligation on behalf of Albertans to bring questions to the minister, and I can't forsake that duty.

THE CHAIRMAN: Other discussion on the matter? There being none, perhaps we should raise hands this time in order to count properly. All those in favour of the motion please raise their hand. All those against the motion? The motion carries. At 9:30 we shall take our last question and we'll finish off there.

If you'd be so kind, Mr. Minister, opening remarks.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's often been said that the Minister of Environment has a hot seat. That's not true, but having regard for the earlier comments by one of my colleagues that we just rose here moments ago, it seems, my seat is at least still warm from the previous sitter.

It's a pleasure for me to present the public accounts for Alberta Environment for 1998-99. Presenting the public accounts is always a challenge. Two years doesn't just seem a long time ago; it was a long time ago, especially when we remember that these public accounts precede last year's government restructuring. In fact, the ministry had a different name at that time, and to avoid confusion, I will refer to the department by its current name.

Our government seems unique in its ability to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances, whether it is to seize opportunity or address emerging issues. Part of that ability comes from our innovative three-year business planning process which requires government departments to look ahead and to take action to achieve future goals. Our capacity for change also comes from a recognized commitment to leadership. When change is called for, we prefer to lead rather than to follow.

That commitment to leadership has attracted international attention on many fronts, including how we manage and protect our environment. For example, Alberta Environment recently welcomed a delegation from China that came here to learn about our leading-edge environmental technologies in wastewater treatment, solid waste handling and recycling, air emissions control and monitoring, and how we use global positioning systems in land use planning and monitoring. Last month in Vancouver at Globe 2000 International, the international environmental conference and trade show, the Alberta pavilion attracted a lot – and I do mean a lot – of interest.

When foresightedness and a commitment to leadership go hand in hand, they do result in change. So to create a context for the numbers, I want to start by drawing a picture of what 1998-99 looked like for Alberta Environment. That includes reviewing what we set out to do that year and highlighting some of the special challenges we faced. Then I want to look at how we've worked since to address the issues we identified in that year. I mentioned the three-year business planning process as a catalyst for effective change. I want to look at our 1998-99 business plan and what it set out to do.

Two years ago Alberta Environment's business plan reaffirmed the minister's commitment to accountability and fiscal prudence. Our budget was just over \$290 million, which was \$21 million less than the previous year, yet we were able to retain and even enhance the services we delivered to Albertans and the environment. We did that by using the results of an extensive operational review to focus on our priorities, streamline our processes, and significantly reduce administration costs.

To focus our priorities, the department continued to enhance community-level service by moving more staff and offices into Alberta communities where they're closer to and can better protect the environment and can serve Albertans better.

We amalgamated the environmental regulatory service and the corporate management service into a single environmental service with a broader, more inclusive mandate.

We also continued the government policy of getting out of the business of being in business. The Special Waste Management Corporation ceased operations. Bover waste management retained the business side of the Swan Hills treatment facility, and the ministry continues responsibility for cell monitoring and remediation.

To streamline our processes, we continued our commitment to regulatory reform and to the national environmental harmonization accord. It is, in my strong opinion, content and not the number of regulations that protects our environment. Providing a simpler regulatory environment for our stakeholders also helps our staff spend less time processing approvals for activities that pose low environmental risk and more time enforcing our stringent environmental regulations. The national environmental harmonization accord is a partnership among federal, provincial, and territorial governments that provides for better co-operation and co-ordination among and between governments, clarifies government rules, and helps avoid duplicating environmental activities.

In 1998-99 the province was looking at industrial capital projects with a combined estimated value of \$28 billion. The Natural Resources Conservation Board and the Energy and Utilities Board conducted assessments on 26 major resource projects to set the conditions that protect the environment from possible harmful effects. The ministry reallocated \$2 million from our administrative savings to cover the increased costs of this large number of assessments and to ensure that the assessments and other regulatory components occurred in a timely and efficient manner and did not unnecessarily delay growth and development.

The 1998-99 business plan also made a commitment to achieving three goals: first, to protect and maintain Alberta's high quality of air, land, and water for the health and enjoyment of Albertans; second, to manage Alberta's renewable resources for Alberta's continued prosperity and benefit; and third, to protect and manage Alberta's natural resources and ecosystems for present and future generations of Albertans.

To achieve goal 1, to protect and maintain the quality of our air, land, and water, the department reviewed its environmental standards and found the province had some of the toughest standards in all of North America. The ministry's enforcement program monitored compliance with those standards, obtaining over 2,600 convictions in 1998-99 and \$2.1 million in penalties. To improve those standards even more, the department developed a policy on deep well injection of hazardous waste, developed wastewater management guidelines for fertilizer manufacturers, and worked with stakeholders to develop standards for mercury particulates and ground level ozone. Alberta Environment also chaired the ongoing development of Canada-wide environmental standards through the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment to ensure consistent environmental protection across the country in soil, ozone, and particulate matter.

8:45

In 1998-99 the department also directly invested \$4.5 million in research, which leveraged \$7.6 million in partnership funding. Key areas of research were sustainable forest management and the sources, characteristics, and effects of air emissions.

While the department pursued knowledge through research, we also delivered knowledge through education. In 1998-99 the

department conducted workshops for about 1,300 students and teachers on climate change, forest management, and biodiversity. Approximately 5,000 Calgary and area schoolchildren participated in educational activities at the Jumping Pound demonstration forest. We also provided interpretative programs at many natural heritage sites as well as information through publications, information centres, and the Internet on recreation and special places, environmental conditions, and waste reduction and pesticides.

To achieve goal 2, "to manage Alberta's renewable resources," the department developed a draft framework for water management planning under the new Water Act, published a guideline for industry on developing detailed forest management plans, and worked with other departments to develop Alberta's strategy for action on climate change. On the issue of climate change, last year we established Climate Change Central as a partnership agency for co-ordinating a provincial strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This fiscal year we continue that commitment with \$1.4 million to staff the new bureau of climate change.

In 1998-99 the department also stocked 290 water bodies in the province with more than 24.8 million fish to support Alberta's fisheries, surveyed and mapped all major forest pest infestations, and conducted 100 priority safety inspections for major government and nongovernment-owned dams.

The department also strengthened its commitment to sustainable development. At the Alberta growth summit held in the previous fall, Albertans were clear that economic development also must consider environmental and social values. The department contributed to the Alberta government document Alberta's Commitment to Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management. This document confirms our dual commitment to sustainability and partnership.

In 1998-99 department staff began working with local industry, residents, and other stakeholders to develop the regional sustainable development strategy for the Athabasca oil sands. That strategy was released in August 1999, and what we learned will be applied to future sustainable strategies in other Alberta regions. Still with sustainable management, the department also produced an implementation plan under the Canada forest accord that describes Alberta's ongoing commitment to sustainability in forest management.

To achieve goal 3, "to protect and manage Alberta's natural resources and ecosystems," we continued to increase the amount of land under protection through the Special Places program. In 1998-99 we added or significantly improved protection for 11 new sites, totaling almost 57,000 hectares. The department made significant changes to the Bow Valley. We expanded the Wind Valley natural area by more than 16,000 hectares and renamed it the Bow Valley wildland park. We expanded the Elbow-Sheep wildland park, Bow Valley provincial park, and Yamnuska natural area. We consolidated and expanded three natural areas to become the Bow Flats natural area and created Canmore Nordic Centre provincial park.

To manage our ecosystems effectively, we must rely on the best information and the best available science. To that end, in 1998-1999 the department initiated a major program using satellite technology and other data sources to update existing land-based information for accurate maps and to continue vegetation inventory programs. We continued a five-year program to collect and analyze ecological data to determine sustainable grazing levels in various parts of Alberta. To make the information more usable, we continued converting Alberta's land-based information to the geographic information system format and continued to convert ecological data into digital form for use in automated systems.

All in all, 1998-1999 was a very busy year and a very rewarding

year for Alberta Environment. It was also a very challenging year, especially for fighting wildfires. In 1998 we started with extremely dry spring conditions due in part to less than usual snowfall over the winter. In addition, Environment Canada reported that 1998 was the warmest year on record, plus we had low relative humidity and high wind speeds. All of these factors made 1998 the worst fire year on record. Almost 1,700 fires consumed approximately 735,000 hectares of timber. It was also the most expensive fire year on record. By the end of the fire season we had spent \$240 million fighting wildfires, almost five times our \$50 million fire-suppression budget.

For Alberta Environment the 1998 fire season was a benchmark for change. The land and forest service restructured to address many of the concerns raised from the 1998 fire year. We created a 10 fire zone structure and a fire prevention section at the Provincial Forest Fire Centre. We reassigned 40 positions to fire operations, and we bought new equipment and technology and introduced new training methods and more training courses.

I talked a bit earlier about rapid change. These improvements were in place in time for the 1999 fire year, and as a result, even though we had nearly the same number of fires in 1999, roughly 1,350 fires in 1999 compared to 1,700 in 1998, we only lost 121,000 hectares of land in 1999 compared to 735,000 the previous year, and the amount of money that we spent in 1999 was \$165 million compared to \$240 million the previous year. Both the Auditor General's review and a review by an independent consultant acknowledged the many improvements that were made as a result of the 1998 fire year.

In our current business plan we continue our commitment to efficient fire-fighting operations. This fiscal year the department will spend \$5 million to bring our fire-fighting communications up to the North American standard for greater firefighter safety and greater tactical efficiency.

However, we have not changed our \$50 million fire-suppression budget. Dry conditions continue to affect Alberta today, and I moved up the official start of the forest fire season by a month. Already we have had 46 fires by the 6th of April this year, compared to 18 in the same period last year. However, if we get another spring snowfall like we had on Sunday, April 9, this year and if we get it in the north and north-central part of the province where the trees are, it could drastically reduce our need for fire fighting, as could, of course, a wet spring or summer. We will continue to address fire-suppression costs throughout the year as and if the need arises.

To summarize, 1998-99 was a year of change. We worked to become more effective and more efficient. We strengthened our presence in and service to Alberta's communities. We started new directions and initiatives in sustainable development and climate change. In protecting our environment, the ability to change is one of the greatest assets one can have. Sometimes it is just as important to know when and where we should not change, because the current focus continues to be on the right thing to do.

Throughout my presentation I showed how Alberta Environment's 2000-2003 business plan delivers that continuity with a greater financial commitment. Our total increase is \$26 million for the current fiscal year alone. Our staff continued to be our most important asset in protecting the environment. This year \$11.5 million, almost half of our total increase, is going to meet increased staffing costs, provide more training and staff development, and hire more enforcement officers. My department is also continuing its commitment to infrastructure support, equipment operating costs, and site reclamation with an additional \$3.1 million in spending. Our policy commitment to endangered species has not changed, but this year we are spending an additional \$2.2 million for increased

monitoring, to build our knowledge and understanding so that we can better preserve our wildlife.

To conclude, our new business plan continues the essential regulatory monitoring, enforcement, and resource management work that we carried out in 1998-1999. Then, as now, our two core businesses in 1998-1999, resource management and environmental hazard management, continue unchanged. The 1998-99 results report shows success in delivering on those core businesses, especially in resource management. The 1998-99 timber harvesting remained well below the annual allowable cut, ensuring timber sustainability.

8:55

We continued to increase the amount of land protected as a park or natural reserve, and visitation to parks and recreation areas remained steady at almost 8.5 million visits. We maintained air quality in the province over the last decade, and the quality of our surface water remains within the range of the last five years. Data from the most recent endangered species survey showed that the number of species at risk continued to go down. As we look back, we can see that this government delivered on its commitment to protecting and sustaining Alberta's environment in all its diversity. As we look ahead, that commitment continues undiminished, and I ask your approval of these 1998-99 public accounts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I must remind the committee again that even though the minister out of the goodness of his heart, I suspect, went over from the 1998-1999 year into some current policy, we in fact are not allowed to do that and will be called to task if we do. You know that, of course.

Ms Blakeman, if you'd like to commence, followed by Mrs. O'Neill.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for your wise words of caution.

Welcome to the minister and his staff and welcome again to the Auditor and accompanying staff. I think we have a few fun seekers and sports fans in the gallery, and welcome to them. I always enjoy their perusal of our proceedings.

The minister spoke a great deal about the fire season in the summer of 1998, and we know that we're already going into an expected second severe fire season this summer. Therefore, I'd like to be learning from the lessons, hopefully, that were gone through in that period of time. My questions are around those issues, and I'll refer you to page 148 of the Auditor General's report. I note that contracts with key suppliers were not in place at the beginning of the fire season. I'm sure that had an impact on the rates that were charged. I'm wondering, as well, why the fire stations were not fully staffed and all of the arrangements for the infrastructure – the transportation and the base camps and equipment – were not in place at the beginning of the fire season when obviously the department was anticipating that it would be a severe fire season. What has the evaluation shown you were the reasons that these things were not in place?

MR. QUINTILIO: In the 1998 fire season we had very, very dry conditions, and the events that caught us a little by surprise were really heavy wind events that caused fires to be very, very difficult to control. That was part of our problem in '98.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. Then I'll ask a supplemental to that. What were the recommendations that were made by the joint service/industry committee and the other internal committees to

improve the fire-fighting operations? There must have been a series of recommendations. If perhaps that's not available at the tip of your fingers, then I would just ask that it be submitted in writing through the secretary of the committee.

MR. MAR: We can do that.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's fine. Thank you.  
Mrs. O'Neill, please.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Minister and your staff and Mr. Auditor General. My question is specifically relating to both page 160 in the Auditor General's report and then page 62 in your ministry's report. It has to do with the revenues under schedules 1 and 2 – I'm in your annual report now – the fees, permits, and licences. I would ask if these are collected under the Alberta Conservation Association and what portion of the fees with respect to hunting and fishing might be allocated in this or whether that's in its entirety.

MR. PERRY: I think I can answer half the question, and then I'll ask Morley Barrett to help me if I stray.

Essentially, you're referring to the DAO, the Alberta Conservation Association, by the reference to page 160, I presume.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes.

MR. PERRY: Okay. In the department and the ministry those fees do not accrue to the ministry. That is paid directly through a contract provider, which is ISM. They run the system which administers the licensing of fees. I believe they take approximately between \$2 million and \$3 million, Morley, of the fee to operate the Alberta Conservation Association. The remainder of the fee goes to the general revenue fund.

MR. BARRETT: It varies per licence. In essence, there's a \$6 fee for each transaction. That is the cost of the transaction and is kept by the service provider, ISM, who is under contract to both develop and operate the service on behalf of us and the Alberta Conservation Association. So the money, as Mr. Perry said, splits two ways, some to general revenue and the bulk of that money to the Alberta Conservation Association. It amounts to, in round figures – and it's dependent on the number of licences sold – about \$8 million a year to the Conservation Association. They determine its specific allocations and projects through their own processes within the Alberta Conservation Association. We do have some discussion on priorities and things, but it's really through their own processes and priority schemes and approval networks that money is allocated.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you.

A supplemental to that. Again I'm back to your annual report, page 62. Under fees, permits, and licences would that be the portion that is allocated to the general revenue fund? Is it a part to the DAO and a part to the department, or does this stay within the department?

MR. PERRY: This is the portion, what you see in fees and permits, that goes to the general revenue fund and only that portion of it.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Olsen, followed by Mr. Cao.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I'll refer you to your annual report, page 12, and your goal 1, "to protect and maintain Alberta's high quality

air, land and water for the health and enjoyment of Albertans." If we go down to strategy 1, your annual report talks about that you would continue "to develop the Guideline for the Designation of Contaminated Sites." I'm wondering if that work is now complete and how the plan will be implemented around the province. What was your resource allocation for that?

MS TRIMBEE: I don't know that I can answer your specific questions on resource allocation, where we're going with this. I don't think I can really answer your specific question there.

MS OLSEN: So you can't answer if the guideline is complete? Your annual report stated that it's, I guess, a work in progress, and I'm wondering how far along you are now.

MS TRIMBEE: I think there are still some issues that we have to sort out on the appropriate standards.

MS OLSEN: Okay. Well, maybe I'll then take my next question to the standards. On that same page you talk about the "comparison of Alberta's environmental standards to those of other North American jurisdictions." We often see the comparison of standards, but we feel what's equally important is the enforcement of those standards. Have there been any comparators in relation to the enforcement of the standards and how the community is benefiting from the standards set out? Do there need to be any changes along the way?

9:05

MS TRIMBEE: We have started to do benchmarking on enforcement with other jurisdictions. I believe there is a report. I'm not certain if this report goes back far enough. But we have made some comparisons to other jurisdictions on some of the compliance and enforcement activities. The first step we did was compare standards. The second step was comparing our enforcement of those standards. So we do have some information that I could make available.

MS OLSEN: That was going to be my next question. I'd appreciate it if we could get that information through the chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you kindly.

Mr. Cao, followed by Ms Blakeman, please.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I appreciate very much the work of the department in managing our environment. My question is regarding page 17 of the Environment ministry annual report, talking about the strategy for streamlining regulatory processes and legislative requirement. We know that we've had large project announcements in the past few years and many of them are oil sands related. Could the minister or his staff tell us what the government has done to ensure that these projects are properly assessed given that the strategy to streamline the process is there?

MR. BARRETT: Yes. Perhaps I'll just start, and then Annette Trimbee can supplement. Some of the work we're doing is through establishing a broad working relationship with other regulatory groups, including the federal government, and involving all manner of interested parties through industry, the community level, and other folks to look at the standards and the application of them and assessing responsibilities to meet some of these new regulatory standards and processes.

There are ongoing efforts, as well, in other areas such as water codes of practice that have been evolving and now are in place in a

number of areas including pipeline crossings and temporary diversions of water which have been developed through a very broad consultation process with all manner of users, including in this case municipalities, industry, environmental groups, and others that would be involved not only in the application and use of these guidelines but also in the regulation and enforcement of them. So they've been looked at rather broadly, and there have been some specific projects and relationships with the harmonization of approvals and joint hearings that have been set up to minimize duplication with the federal government and other interested groups.

Annette, would you like to add to that?

MS TRIMBEE: Just to go back to your original question, you were asking about streamlining and how that could have an outcome on the effectiveness of the process. So I think the message I want to give is that what we're trying to do is streamline but not sacrifice the quality of the product. You mentioned oil sands. With oil sands projects in many cases there is both a federal requirement for the proponent to do an environmental impact assessment and a provincial requirement for the proponent to do an environmental impact assessment.

So what we did in 1998-99 is we began work on the negotiation of a bilateral agreement that was consistent with the principles in the environmental accord signed by the federal Minister of the Environment as well as provincial and territorial ministers. What we did in this bilateral agreement is establish a way to work jointly with the federal government to ensure that we met the requirements of both the federal laws and the provincial laws but met them through essentially one assessment. So there we're trying to work more closely with the federal government to ensure that the job gets done well and the job gets done once and it meets both parties' requirements.

The other thing we have done to streamline the process for oil sands is work carefully with the EUB and with other departments to ensure that the application that goes forward includes all of the information required for an assessment and for an approval in one package rather than going through a very lengthy sequential process.

MR. CAO: Thank you. I have a supplemental. When we're talking about approval and we mention process, in the Auditor General's report on page 158 regarding the enhancing of the approval systems there is some statement in there to the effect that "attention should be directed to the issues of management information and data completeness." I would like to ask: what action or progress has been made on that regarding the environmental management systems?

MS TRIMBEE: I guess it's fair to say that the priorities for the environmental management systems have shifted to making the system more user friendly to all of those staff that have to use the system.

Originally when this system was being built, it was built to put information in without enough attention paid to how you'd need to access that information and work with that. So I think it's fair to say that there is a strategic plan to ensure that it is more user friendly and to use it more as an information management tool rather than as a storage box that you never have to go back into. I think it was used more like a registry rather than an information management tool.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Amery.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I'm back on page 12 of the annual report from the department, on deep well injection of

hazardous waste. Now, it does say that there is a policy. I think Alberta is the only place that has deep well injection of hazardous wastes. I'm wondering if you can confirm that for me and perhaps talk about why the decision was made to allow that here and why other places don't do it.

MS TRIMBEE: I can't confirm with certainty that Alberta is the only place. In terms of why this might be allowed in Alberta, I think there's a lengthy geological answer for that, but that, again, I don't think I can give you with enough clarity.

THE CHAIRMAN: Filing that through the secretary would perhaps be the wisest way to do that.

Supplementary?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah. As I'm looking for the policy – and of course we'd like to have a copy if it's available – in particular I'm wondering what guarantees there are that the aquifers would not be affected.

MS TRIMBEE: Again, the answer on guarantees related to aquifers would be a risk management answer, so I will get you some of that information as well. If you're asking for absolute guarantees, there won't be an absolute guarantee. It will be a question of degree of risk.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Amery, followed by Ms Olsen.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, everyone. Mr. Minister, I'd like to refer you to page 83 of your ministry's annual report, and my question deals with the Environmental Appeal Board. It shows that the Environmental Appeal Board ran a deficit of \$118,000 in 1998-99. I wonder if you could explain the reasons behind that deficit.

MR. PERRY: For '98-99 essentially the Environmental Appeal Board deficit is due to the number of appeals. That year there were 251 appeals filed, and 35 were actually dealt with during that year. In addition, the board had six active judicial reviews during that fiscal year. So I think that essentially it is the number of appeals that's driving the expenditure.

9:15

MR. AMERY: So those were unexpected appeals based on previous years.

MR. PERRY: Their activity has been actually quite busy over a number of years. In terms of how we budget for it, we've set it at a level based on an average budget which would be required with the understanding that if there is increased activity in that fiscal year, it will be dealt with within the ministry allocation process.

MR. AMERY: Are there any measures in place that the board will take to maintain a balanced budget in the future now that it has the water legislation under its jurisdiction?

MR. PERRY: Yes. In fact, the board is moving to a mediation process rather than a legal appeal process to resolve some of these issues as they're coming up and not getting into a costly process. I think that as well they're going to one-person appeal hearings as opposed to a larger tribunal. I think that with those cost measures they will be able to stay within their budget.

MR. AMERY: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Olsen, followed by Ms Kryczka.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I'll stick with page 12 and move down to the strategy, "Monitor, assess and take action to maintain the quality of Alberta's air, land and water." I would like to just have a little bit of discussion about the delegated administrative organizations, which have been a pet peeve of mine for a number of years.

The Auditor General has in previous reports stated that the accountability framework was not adequate. You've talked about the approved accountability framework for DAOs under your ministry. What has been done to improve the accountability of the Alberta Used Oil Management Association? With that, what's being done to clean up the orphaned gasoline station sites in situations where the owner cannot afford the cost of the cleanup?

MR. RADKE: Perhaps I could discuss the accountability framework. There is across government a certain standard for maintaining the accountability of DAOs. We have in the Department of Environment approved one that's consistent with that, and we have been applying it systematically across all the DAOs. The Tire Recycling Management Association and the Used Oil Management Association DAOs are ones that we have applied that standard to, and we are confident that they in fact meet the accountability framework. I don't have with me the specifics to the accountability framework, but I would be pleased to forward that.

MS OLSEN: I would appreciate that.

To go back then, I guess my concern is that there was some talk about the levy on the wholesale price of oil to cover the cost of cleanup.

We'll go back to my first question then. What's being done about the cleanup of orphaned gasoline station sites where the owners can't afford to clean up? Have you addressed that issue? Is the province undertaking to do that and then working out some arrangement with the owners of those stations? Enlighten us.

MR. MAR: The responsibility for that has been moved over to the Department of Municipal Affairs, although with respect to the assessment of sites the Department of Environment will continue to work with Municipal Affairs in that regard.

MS OLSEN: So nothing's being done is essentially what you're saying. You've moved it, but I want to ask: what's being done?

MR. MAR: I can't speak for what's being done in Municipal Affairs.

THE CHAIRMAN: A supplementary in that year specific. Remember that we're not dealing with current; we're dealing with '98-99. A supplementary question relating to that year?

MS OLSEN: No. I think I've had my fair share of questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: That was my assessment also.  
Ms Kryczka.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Starting, I guess, first with page 19 of your annual report. Just referring to page 19, I certainly applaud goal 3 and the achievements there; for instance, the "added or improved protection for 56,800 new hectares in the protected areas network." I also acknowledge over on page 30 that there is a target to also increase parks and natural reserves in Alberta.

My question basically is: in your business plans and therefore your annual reports do you include any initiatives that are truly interdepartmental in nature, such as working with Economic Development and Community Development to acknowledge recreational and historical sites development for use and appreciation by Albertans? I guess my point would be that it seems that with special places, there are many Albertans – and I certainly receive communication in my office from a number of Albertans – that want to see special places protected and no development, but I think there are also many Albertans who would appreciate being able to use special areas for recreational purposes. Do you see a conflict with the goals of your department and, say, the goals of Economic Development?

MR. BARRETT: Perhaps I'll respond. There are processes in place to work on every site with these departments involved – Agriculture, Economic Development, Resource Development, and others – to review the specific interests and the problems and challenges associated with each site, so nothing comes forward from a working level that hasn't had their involvement. The process, of course, calls for local committees to be involved in each site, and all those various interests on the ground are also captured at that level, from the personal interests in recreational pursuits to more preservation interests and more industry interests, so they're all part of the initial consideration of the boundary of a candidate's site.

When those interests are consolidated into a recommendation, they return to the department with the recommendation to the minister, at which time they're taken by the department and consultation occurs with all other potentially affected departments. Sometimes the nature of the site, the size, the location, or the boundaries are considered and adjusted to meet the mutual interests of all the goals, but the bottom line is that we try obviously to minimize conflicts and make sure that we have full consideration of these interests and still go forward with the very optimal sites that we can. These are all, of course, captured in this level, too, through standing policy committees, cabinet decisions before any places are designated as special places. So I think there is a great consultation process at all levels.

MS KRYCZKA: I have no supplemental.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Cao.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks. I'm really interested in the previous answer, and I'd like to explore that a bit more. I'm referring you once again – it would have been nice to have had the rest of the time to explore these entire hundred pages. I'm still on page 12, where we're talking about the delegated administrative organizations and the Alberta Used Oil Management Association. I know there was a committee that was being chaired by Paul Langevin that was around this issue and was reviewing this. So I take it that this has now been transferred to Municipal Affairs. Can you talk to me about the rationale for that, or was that the recommendation that came from this committee that was chaired by Mr. Langevin? I don't understand why. This doesn't make sense to me, that this, which is so obviously an environmental protection issue, would get transferred to Municipal Affairs, so enlighten me.

9:25

MR. RADKE: Perhaps I can help. The responsibility for the development of a program to actually remediate sites and clean up sites is now under Municipal Affairs. We continue to have responsibilities relative to monitoring, inventorying, and reporting. I'm afraid the Langevin committee was before my time, so I'd have to do some research on the report and see how we can tie that into

the answer, but I can't do it now.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. On the same topic then, what about the tire recycling and the accountability around that? I know there were quite a few issues that were raised about that, so I'm assuming it's still a DAO under your department.

MR. RADKE: It's still under Environment, yes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. What sorts of changes have been brought in? Maybe you could talk about the Auditor General's approval of those changes, whether or not they're sufficient to deal with the issues that were raised.

MR. RADKE: Again, unless some of my colleagues are more knowledgeable than I am – I'm relatively new to this issue, so I'll have to do some research and get back to you on it.

THE CHAIRMAN: You can do so through the secretary of the committee.

Mr. Cao to finish off, please.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is in fact looking at the annual report on the financial side, pages 86, 87, onwards. Looking at the items on the list, I just want to pose a question. Environmental protection is not just doing what takes place and reacting to it but also in prevention, on the education side. So I was wondering: it didn't say specifically in there, but is there any expenditure, item, or project on education regarding environmental protection?

MS TRIMBEE: We do have an education branch that develops materials for use in elementary school and high school and even some products that are used by some of the colleges. That is a very active program with a network throughout the province. The statistics show that we reach about 1,300 teachers a year, and we reach thousands of students. We focus our materials on topics that are important, that mesh with the education curriculum, topics that are important to Alberta Environment as well as topics that the teachers want to teach at particular grades. I think we have a very active program. We get excellent feedback on that program. We also talk about education in the context of making sure that Albertans are aware of the environmental laws, so there's an education component to our compliance program as well.

MR. MAR: Maybe I can give the hon. member a couple of concrete examples of how that education program works. Many years ago there was a wildlife conservation education program that was delivered in schools. Now a foundation known as the Wise Foundation has taken up on the challenge of delivering that program. They have, for example, in the city of Calgary a facility that's located across the street from Southwood elementary school where thousands and thousands of schoolchildren and members of, say, nongovernment organizations, like the Rotary Club or a church group, may wish to come in and be part of an ongoing educational program. It's a fantastic facility, and it's delivered by volunteers and performs a very important function.

Another example that the Department of Environment would be involved in is the fish in schools program, which is operated out of the Sam Livingston fish hatchery, also in the city of Calgary. With that program, tanks are provided to schools throughout the province. The tanks have chiller units and each school, in addition to the tank and the chilling unit, is given 100 fish eggs. There will be somebody from the Department of Environment who will serve as an adviser

to the teacher in the classroom to give them instructions on how to teach their kids about the life cycle of fish. At the end of the hatching period, when the fish reach a certain size, the students are given a place where they can release the fish back into the environment, and this, I can say firsthand, has been one of the best learning experiences for children, with real hands-on experience in this very important resource to Albertans.

THE CHAIRMAN: I thought surely your supplementary would be asking who counted the hundred eggs, but we'll pass on that one.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for the very full and complete answers. We the committee are quite happy to receive the information from the sources that are closest to it, those that represent the various parts of your department, unlike many other ministers who try to answer every single question themselves, which is nigh impossible with this committee. So we thank you for that.

MS OLSEN: I obviously missed something.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Prior to your arrival the committee passed a motion that we'd complete this particular committee meeting at approximately 9:30. So there will be no more discussion on that matter, I'm afraid, because it would be revisiting a decision of the committee, and in fact that is against the rules of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly.

MS OLSEN: Fair enough. I just want to register my opposition.

THE CHAIRMAN: Next week we have the Hon. Iris Evans before us, the Minister of Children's Services. That's April 19.

Any further motions or discussions? I see none. Motion for adjournment? Is it agreed? Carried. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 9:32 a.m.]

